Dr. Kat Zarychta,
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TECHNOLOGY, MIND & HEALTH

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Dr. Kat Zarychta,
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TECHNOLOGY, MIND & HEALTH

Global Reflections on Mental Balance, Human Development, and Governance in the Digital Era

GAFG

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With immense gratitude, we honour our speakers, whose wisdom, generosity, and unwavering endurance carried this vision into being.

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PREFACE

The Sovereignty of the Mind in the Age of Algorithms

Technology does not sleep, but our minds deserve an analog life.

We inhabit a paradox of unprecedented proportions. We are the most connected generation in human history, yet we face a silent epidemic of isolation. We carry the sum of human knowledge in our pockets, yet our collective capacity for deep reasoning and problem-solving has been in decline since the early 2010s. We have built tools of miraculous efficiency, yet we find ourselves exhausted, anxious, and increasingly alienated from our own inner lives.

This volume, Technology, Mind & Health, emerges not merely as a record of dialogue, but as a clarion call at a critical juncture for our species. As the lead author and a practitioner standing at the intersection of technology, innovation, and holistic health, I write this foreword with a profound sense of urgency and hope. The data before us is stark, and it demands that we treat mental health not as a peripheral concern of wellness, but as the foundational bedrock of human development, ethical governance, and our collective future.

Consider the arithmetic of our current reality. According to the World Health Organization, more than one billion people—one in seven individuals—live with a mental health condition. Depression stands as the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting 264 million lives, while anxiety disorders grip 301 million, with rates climbing precipitously among the young. In the United States alone, one in five adults experiences mental illness annually, yet less than half receive treatment. This is a crisis of access, but it is also a crisis of priority. Despite mental health conditions accounting for 290 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), they receive a meager 2% of global healthcare spending. McKinsey estimates that bridging the $200 to $350 billion investment gap could reduce the global disease burden by over 40% by 2050. The economic and moral imperative has never been clearer: failing to invest in the mind is a failure of governance.

Simultaneously, our digital behaviors are reshaping our neurology and our social fabric. The average person now spends two hours and twenty-four minutes daily on social media, checking their phone 159 times a day. Globally, 64.7% of the population is active on social platforms. Yet, this hyper-connectivity often yields disconnection.

Forty-one percent of Gen Z report feeling anxious or depressed after social media use; depression rates among young women have risen by 50%, linked directly to platform usage. We are witnessing the algorithmic erosion of attention, the disruption of sleep, and the commodification of our emotional states. As I emphasized during the summit, we must recognize that while artificial intelligence can process data at light

speed, it cannot feel, empathize, or heal. The human mind is not a dataset to be optimized; it is a sanctuary of consciousness that requires protection, nuance, and care.

It was against this backdrop of urgency that the Global Academy for Future Governance (GAFG) convened the Technology, Mind & Health Summit. Guided by the Academy's foundational '3M' matrix—seeking the maximum good for the maximum species over the maximum time—this gathering was a testament to the power of interdisciplinary, multispatial, and cross-generational collaboration. GAFG's mission to advance ethical, human-centered governance provided the essential frame: technological progress must be measured not by its speed, but by its contribution to human flourishing.

What made this summit truly unparalleled was its radical inclusivity. We dissolved the hierarchies that often stifle global discourse. In a rare convergence, seasoned diplomats, neuroscientists, and policymakers stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the youngest voices of our time. The image of an eleven-year-old participant engaging with former foreign ministers and global experts remains etched in my memory. It symbolized a vital truth: mental health knows no age, no border, and no rank. The digital era affects us all, and the solutions must be co-created by all.

The wisdom captured in these pages reflects the diversity of that assembly. We heard from Dr. Philippe Reinisch, GAFG Co-Founder, who framed the mismatch between our curated digital personas and our authentic inner selves. Jesinta Adams, Assistant Director-General for Africa, highlighted

how structural inequalities and governance failures exacerbate mental health burdens, and reminded us that innovation without compassion risks leaving the most vulnerable behind.

Our contributors offered rigorous analysis and actionable frameworks. Ambassador Vladimir Norov drew upon his diplomatic experience to advocate for human-centered design and resilience, urging us to view AI as a tool for transformation rather than a source of disruption. Prof. John A. Naslund from Harvard Medical School introduced the EMPOWER Model, demonstrating how psychosocial interventions can be scaled to meet the global demand for care. Dr. Malek Bajbouj of Charité Berlin examined the psychological toll of conflict, pandemics, and ecological anxiety, positioning trustworthy digital tools as essential lifelines when governed ethically.

We delved into the neurobiological impacts of our digital habits. Prof. María Castelló from Uruguay brought a poignant perspective from the Global South and warned of the neurosocial consequences of prolonged technology use on developing brains, calling for policies that address digital inequities. Prof. Birgitta Dresp-Langley proposed a unifying biological model, linking excessive screen time and artificial light to the disruption of neurochemical pathways in children. Marisa Peer challenged us to reimagine digital spaces, moving away from addictive architecture toward tools that foster genuine learning and mental enrichment. Dr. Khaled El-Enany Ezz reinforced that education must evolve beyond technical mastery to include cultural and ethical literacy, ensuring we remain the masters of our tools.

Yet perhaps the most resonant voices were those of the youth. Led by Theodora Vounidi of the Balkan Youth Cooperation, the Technology, Mind & Health Essay Competition received 40 submissions from participants aged 11 to 28 across the globe. The winners—Nikos Gialitsis from Greece, Claudio Mancini from Italy, and Kennedy Agustin from the Philippines—offered insights that were both searing and hopeful. They reminded us that for the digital native generation, the boundary between the online and offline self is porous. Their essays were not just academic exercises; they were testimonies of lived experience, urging us to protect their right to mental balance in a world that constantly demands their attention.

This eBook is a curation of these global reflections, refined into narratives that challenge policymakers, practitioners, and citizens alike. It is an invitation to move beyond digital determinism. As Prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic noted in his closing remarks, technological advancement is inevitable, but its impact on humanity is not predetermined. It depends on the choices we make.

We stand at a crossroads. We can allow technology to become an extractive force that mines our attention and fragments our psyche, or we can wield it as an instrument of restoration. We can build digital ecosystems that prioritize psychological well-being, that respect cognitive limits, and that foster genuine connection. This requires ethical frameworks, evidence-based policies, and a governance model that places mental health at the center of decision-making.

To the reader: whether you are a policymaker drafting regulations, a technologist designing algorithms, a clinician

treating patients, or a parent guiding a child, this volume asks you to adopt two habits: intellectual rigor and human humility. We must rigorously assess the impact of our tools, and we must humbly acknowledge that no algorithm can replace the healing power of human empathy.

The Global Academy for Future Governance has committed to annualizing this summit and the youth essay competition, ensuring that this dialogue continues to evolve. But the work cannot wait for the next gathering. The future of our minds depends on the actions we take today. Let us commit to a governance of care, where technology serves the '3M' matrix, enhancing the well-being of all species across time. Let us protect the sovereignty of the human mind, ensuring that as our digital footprint expands, our mental balance remains sacred.

Technological mastery, ethical governance, and human development without mental health are merely extraction. Progress without balance is peril. Let this book be your guide toward a future where technology and humanity thrive together, anchored in the wisdom of the mind and the warmth of the heart.

Dr. Kat Zarychta

INTRODUCTION

I.
Digital Age and Mental Balance

The accelerated digital platformization of nearly all aspects of life—work, education, governance, and even leisure—has created what many now call an "always-on" culture. This has not only blurred the boundaries between public and private life, the real and the simulated, but has also contributed to rising levels of anxiety, burnout, manipulation, addiction, digital fatigue, and even mental disorders—especially among the most vulnerable, younger, and increasingly contactless generations.

Pressing as these issues are, they necessitate urgent and bold action. They leave little maneuvering space for policymakers and legislators, governments, schools, and parents—societies and individuals alike.

Send us a request, share your concerns or ideas, or simply ask for more information about our policy proposals and thorough research on the topic. You can also explore the program we've prepared for groups and individuals across different generations, focused on analog retreats (resocialization,

digital detox, as well as incentives, directives, and techniques to restore the analog self).

The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in an Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society

As most global undertakings focus solely on economic enhancement, any genuine path toward well-being must also confront the psychological and social toll of unrelenting digital exposure. The recent acceleration of digital platforms into nearly all aspects of life—work, education, governance, and even leisure—has created what many now call an "always-on" culture.

This has not only blurred the boundaries between public and private life, the real and the simulated, but has also contributed to rising levels of anxiety, burnout, and digital fatigue, especially among younger, increasingly contactless generations.

A recovery plan rooted in well-being must defend what could be termed a basic liberty—the right to an analog life—which is the right to meaningful offline time unmediated by screens, algorithms, or notifications. Public institutions, workplaces, and schools should actively promote "analog weekends," nature immersion programs, and screen-free zones to restore attention, mental balance, and human connection.

How can we restore the analog self? Protecting analog space and slowness is not a nostalgic act but a strategic investment in mental resilience and civic cohesion in an overstimulated age, especially for the younger cohorts of our societies.

One of our recent studies, presented at the General Assembly of the UN in New York, and before that at the OSCE in Vienna, concludes:

Mental health disorders affect 1 in 8 persons globally. Depression is already the leading cause of disability worldwide. We spend 2.5 hours daily on social media, yet 1 in 3 young adults feels isolated. Despite this, mental health receives just 2% of global health budgets.

This is not a resource gap—it's a moral failure. We are losing 290 million years of human potential while cognitive resilience declines in an age demanding unprecedented adaptability.

We face the Digital Paradox: Our Collective Dilemma. We are more 'connected' than ever—checking our phones 159 times a day—but less present; we are available but not socialized. Young women's depression rates have surged 50% due to digital comparison, and 41% of Gen Z feel anxiety after scrolling. Technology promises connection but delivers distraction. We are 'networked' but not 'nurtured'. (K.Z. at the UNGA, Sep 2025)

KEYNOTES

II.1
Diplomacy, Mental Health, and Global Governance in the Digital Era

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues, dear friends,

It is a pleasure and an honor to join this important gathering devoted to the intersection of technology, the human mind, and public health.

In recent years, this triad has moved from an academic question to a central challenge for governments, industries, and societies.

Today, the ways in which we design, regulate, and apply technologies will increasingly determine not only economic outcomes, but also the psychological resilience and social well-being of entire nations.

As someone who has spent decades in diplomacy, international cooperation, and now in the development of artificial intelligence ecosystems across Central Asia, I have seen both the immense promise and the profound risks that accompany technological progress.

The digital revolution has expanded access to knowledge, improved governance, and opened opportunities for millions.

At the same time, it has created complex challenges for mental health, social cohesion, and the ethical foundations upon which our societies rest.

First, let me emphasize that technological development is no longer isolated to the domain of engineers or computer scientists.

It is a cross-disciplinary endeavor.

Artificial intelligence influences behavioral patterns, decision-making, and emotional well-being.

Digital platforms shape public discourse and can both strengthen and weaken democratic processes.

And while new medical technologies expand diagnostic capabilities, they also introduce questions of trust, privacy, and equitable access.

Second, the relationship between technology and the mind has become increasingly asymmetric.

Machines learn faster, scale instantly, and operate without fatigue. Humans do not.

The pace of innovation has begun to surpass the pace of human adaptation.

This gap is visible not only in education, but also in governance systems and labor markets.

As leaders, policymakers, and researchers, we must ensure that human capacities—intellectual, emotional, and ethical—remain at the center of technological development.

This is where the issue of mental health becomes crucial.

The World Health Organization now lists mental disorders among the leading causes of disability globally.

Digital dependence, information saturation, and algorithmic manipulation are emerging factors.

We are seeing the psychological toll of constant connectivity, algorithmic echo chambers, and the anxiety of technological displacement.

We should not overlook the silent but growing psychological burden created by constant connectivity and the erosion of genuine human contact.

However, technology—especially AI—can also be part of the solution.

With proper governance frameworks, AI can strengthen psychological well-being, support early diagnosis of mental disorders, and expand access to quality care in regions where professional resources are limited.

In Central Asia, for example, digital tools are already improving telemedicine, multilingual education platforms, and data-driven public health strategies.

But for such progress to be sustainable, we need shared principles.

To get this right, we need a new playbook, built on three core pillars:

First, human-centered design. Technologies must be evaluated not only for efficiency but for their impact on human cognition, behavioral health, and social relationships.

We must resist the temptation to adopt systems simply because they are powerful or fashionable.

Second, ethical and inclusive governance.

Countries at different stages of development should not be left behind. Without inclusive frameworks, digital inequality will deepen, leading to new forms of marginalization and instability.

We need global standards and cooperation to ensure no country, no community, is left behind.

This isn't just about fairness; it's about global stability.

Third, strengthening resilience.

Resilience is not merely the capacity to withstand shocks.

It is the ability to maintain mental integrity, critical thinking, and emotional well-being amid rapid technological change.

This requires interdisciplinary education, digital literacy, and policies that safeguard the mental health of young generations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our legacy will not be defined by the technology we invent, but by the wisdom we show in governing it.

The goal is a future where technology doesn't replace us, but elevates us; where it doesn't overwhelm the mind, but strengthens it.

Our era is defined not only by technological innovation but by the responsibility to guide it wisely.

If we succeed, technology will amplify human potential, not diminish it.

It will reinforce mental health, not compromise it.

It will empower societies to solve problems, rather than create new ones.

I believe that the dialogue we have today—among scientists, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders—is essential.

No single institution and no single nation can address these challenges alone.

But together, we can shape a future in which technological development is aligned with human dignity, ethical values, and social well-being.

Let us approach this future with confidence, cooperation,

and a commitment to placing the human mind at the center of technological progress.

Thank you.

Vladimir Norov
30 NOV 2025

II.2
Technology and Human Development: Safeguarding Mental Health and Youth Well-Being in the Digital Era

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a profound honor to address you today at a time when humanity stands at a crossroads—between innovation and introspection, between progress and balance.

We are living through a digital era that has transformed every dimension of our lives. Technology has become a defining force in human development—shaping how we learn, work, communicate, and even how we understand ourselves.

Yet amid this remarkable transformation, there emerges a quiet but pressing concern: the challenge of mental balance, health, and youth well-being in the digital age.

This is not simply a question of access to healthcare. It is about how we, as a global community, ensure that technological progress uplifts rather than overwhelms the human spirit. It is about how we build a world where digital innovation and mental well-being coexist in harmony.

I. The Paradox of the Digital Era

Never before has humanity been so connected—and yet, never before have so many people felt so isolated.

The very tools that empower us can also exhaust us. The same platforms that spread knowledge and creativity can, at times, erode confidence and peace of mind.

According to the World Health Organization, one in eight people across the globe lives with a mental disorder, and depression and anxiety cost the world economy more than one trillion dollars each year. But beyond these figures are personal stories—of young people navigating cyberbullying, of families struggling with constant connectivity, and of workers unable to disconnect from the demands of an always-online world.

Technology is not the enemy of well-being. But we must guide its use with wisdom. **Human development in the digital era must be measured not only by economic growth, but also by emotional resilience and social cohesion.**

II. Education, Culture, and the Foundations of Mental Balance

The key to sustaining mental balance in the digital era lies in education and culture—the very foundations of human development.

Education must go beyond teaching technical skills. It must nurture critical thinking, empathy, and emotional intelligence. Digital literacy should empower young people to navigate online spaces safely, to question what they see, and to value their well-being as much as their productivity.

Culture, too, is essential to mental health. It offers identity, belonging, and meaning—all vital to inner balance. Art, heritage, and creativity give people a voice and a sense of continuity in a rapidly changing world.

Through cultural engagement, communities find resilience; through creativity, individuals find healing. As we strengthen global cooperation in education and culture, we also strengthen the psychological foundations of peace.

III. Ethics, Technology, and Human Dignity

The digital revolution has redefined the human experience. Artificial intelligence, social media, and data-driven platforms influence how we think, feel, and interact.

But as technology evolves, so must our ethical frameworks. Progress that undermines well-being cannot be called true progress. We must ask: How can we ensure that innovation serves humanity—not the other way around?

The ethical use of technology is central to human development. Algorithms should respect privacy and foster inclusion. Digital platforms must promote empathy, not division. Ar-

tificial intelligence should enhance learning and health, not manipulate emotions.

In this new frontier, the values of **dignity, empathy, and mental balance** must guide the architecture of the digital world. Human development will only be meaningful if it protects the psychological and emotional integrity of every individual.

IV. The Role of the UN System and Global Cooperation

Addressing the mental health challenges of the digital era requires a collective effort. It calls for cooperation among governments, technology companies, educators, researchers, and civil society—all guided by the shared values of the United Nations.

We must work together to establish global principles for digital mental well-being—principles that affirm mental health as a universal right and as a pillar of sustainable development.

This effort includes:

- Bridging the **digital divide**, ensuring equal access to technology for all, especially for women, rural communities, and young people;

- Encouraging technology companies to design platforms that promote mental balance and digital well-being;

- Supporting education systems that teach not only digital skills but also self-care, empathy, and mindfulness;

- Integrating mental health into national digital strategies, ensuring that progress never comes at the expense of peace of mind.

The youth of today are at the heart of this transformation. They are the most connected generation in history—and yet often the most vulnerable to digital pressures. Their creativity, energy, and resilience must be matched by our commitment to safeguard their mental and emotional health. Supporting youth in finding a balance between technology and self-care is an investment in the very future of human development.

V. A Shared Responsibility

Governments, educators, parents, and the private sector all have a role to play.

Governments must ensure that mental health is integrated into public policy and protected by regulation. Educators must cultivate emotional intelligence alongside digital competence. The private sector, particularly technology developers, must recognize that user well-being is not just an ethical duty—it is also a long-term foundation for trust and sustainable innovation.

And each of us, as individuals, must learn to reclaim balance in our own lives—to disconnect in order to reconnect,

and to use technology as a tool rather than a master. **Mental health in the digital era is, ultimately, a shared responsibility of humanity.**

VI. A Vision for the Future

Let us imagine a future where technology and human development advance hand in hand. A future where every young person can engage with digital tools confidently and creatively, without sacrificing their mental balance or sense of self.

In that future, innovation will be guided by ethics, inclusion, and empathy. The digital era will not divide generations but unite them. Technology will be a bridge to understanding, not a wall of isolation.

Such a future is within our reach—if we have the courage to align technological advancement with the values of compassion, balance, and shared humanity.

VII. Closing Reflections

Excellencies, dear friends,

Our generation stands at a defining moment. The question before us is not whether technology will shape our future, but whether we will shape it wisely.

True human development requires more than progress in science or economics. It requires peace of mind, emotional resilience, and solidarity between people and nations.

As I prepare to serve within the United Nations system, I am convinced that the digital transformation must remain anchored in human values—that mental balance, health, and youth empowerment must become global priorities.

Let us work together—governments, innovators, educators, and citizens—to ensure that the digital age becomes not a source of fragmentation, but a catalyst for well-being, inclusion, and hope.

For only when technology serves humanity can it truly advance human development.

Thank you.

Dr. Khaled El-Enany Ezz

PANELISTS

III.1
Children's Health in the Digital Age

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Introduction

With rapidly spreading digitalization worldwide, more and more people and, in particular, increasingly younger children are spending an increasing number of hours per day online reading on the screens of computers, tablets, and smartphones. This trend has been signaled to now include even the youngest, from ages 0 to 2. Results from several studies suggest that this growing habit is likely to engender multiple health risks such as early myopia and blindness, obesity, sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression, leading to impaired performance at school and behavioral problems. The potential impact of these health risks on our children's future lives and the well-being of future societies as a whole could be dramat-

ic, and public awareness of this problem needs to be fostered in communities as well as on a worldwide scale.

This review of environmental studies, metabolic research, and state-of-the-art research in neurobiology points toward the reduced amount of natural day and sunlight exposure of the developing child—as a consequence of increasingly long hours spent indoors online—as the single unifying source, or common denominator, of all the health risks already statistically identified in the literature. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the health of future generations may be severely compromised if nothing is done to raise public awareness about the necessity for regulatory measures at individual and institutional levels. The standpoint of the author is that society should not wait for risks to be proven beyond any doubt to trigger action—as at such a late stage, the toll already taken will be higher than anticipated.

Health Risks Related to Children's Overexposure to Digital Environments

Myopia and Early Blindness

The evidence for a dramatic rise in myopia, especially in children, sends out a severe warning signal to governments, parents, and clinicians worldwide. This dramatic evolution is linked to the general societal trend where adults spend a large part of their time online and where children start out way too early in life looking at screens for longer and lon-

ger hours every day. Myopia is estimated to affect 108 million people worldwide and is identified as the second most common cause of global blindness. The worldwide economic burden of uncorrected distance vision impairment is currently estimated at 202 billion dollars per annum. Once myopia has set in, treatment must be initiated as early as possible to stop the progression toward total blindness. School-based clinical trials have demonstrated that increasing the amount of time that children spend outdoors to a little more than two hours a day can significantly slow the onset of myopia.

Obesity

Excessive online activity has recently been associated with a significantly higher Body Mass Index in pre-adolescent children. Statistics on childhood obesity collected by the World Health Organization reveal that the number of overweight or obese infants aged 0 to 5 years has increased from 32 million in 1990 to 41 million in 2016. This number is currently projected to reach 60 million worldwide by 2035. Evidence for a direct link between the severity of childhood obesity and the number of screen time hours comes from cross-sectional survey studies showing that the severity of a child's obesity increases with the number of hours of daily screen time. There is stronger evidence for increased energy intake as a prominent causal link between screen time and childhood obesity—children who have more screen time statistically consume fewer fruits and vegetables and more energy-dense snacks, soft drinks, and fast food.

Sleep Disorders, Anxiety, and Depression

Long hours of exposure to digital technology or online activity have been associated with loss of sleep and symptoms of depression in young students. Electronic media, especially when used before bedtime, have a negative impact on the sleep of children and adolescents. Significant relationships between digital device exposure and sleep variables include shorter total sleep times, delayed bedtimes, more frequent night waking, daytime sleepiness, and sleep anxiety. The widespread use of portable electronic devices has meant that insufficient sleep is now affecting 30% of toddlers, preschoolers, school-age children, and the majority of adolescents.

Digital Addiction

Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) is a disabling condition characterized by uncontrolled internet use, associated with significant functional impairment, anxiety, depression, and other psychopathological symptoms. A meta-analysis involving more than 89,000 participants from 31 nations reported a global prevalence estimate for IAD of 6% worldwide—with the highest estimates for the Middle East at approximately 12%. A study published by the American Journal of Epidemiology has shown that teenagers are particularly vulnerable and that the trend toward online technology-induced teenage depression may well reach epidemic proportions if nothing is done to stop it.

The Early Deregulation of Neurotransmitter Pathways in the Developing Brain

What science needs most now is a working model that provides a unifying account of brain-behavior function underlying the health issues identified here. The narrative highlights the complex cause-effect chain that links increased exposure to digital environments to decreased exposure to healthy natural daylight and increased exposure to artificial light sources at the wrong time of day, deficient vitamin D and melatonin levels in the body, perturbed circadian rhythms, and ultimately, the progressive deregulation of the serotonin transmitter pathways in the human brain. This generates a newly emerging syndrome of cognitive and emotional dysfunction akin to that found in severe substance abusers.

Peripheral blood dopamine levels in adolescents with internet addiction were found to be twice as high compared with those of healthy controls—providing direct neurobiological evidence that dopamine pathway regulation is dysfunctional in digital addicts. Patients with Internet Gaming Disorder show a significant decrease in the availability of dopamine in the striatum and a reduced availability of serotonin, consistent with functional MRI studies showing reduced gray matter volume in regions associated with attention, motor coordination, executive function, and decision-making.

Resulting Functional Consequences of Vitamin D and Melatonin Deficiency

The amount of daylight children receive while they develop is a critically important factor to their healthy development.

Exposure to daylight is essential to the regulation of vitamin D and melatonin production in the human body, as both vitamin D and melatonin ensure important and closely related metabolic functions in the regulation of eating habits and sleep. Vitamin D significantly impacts the immune systems in charge of preventing infections and regulating autoimmunity. The health consequences of vitamin D deficiency include the development of symptoms of dementia, depression, borderline schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses. Without sufficient serotonin production, melatonin levels will not rise appropriately to give the body the signal to go to sleep at night.

Conclusions

This exploratory focused review shows quite unequivocally that the projection of increasingly excessive time spent online indoors by increasingly younger children is likely to put their physical and psychological development and general health at risk, in both the short and long term. Early childhood myopia, disturbed circadian rhythms, sleep loss, depression, and ultimately, addiction and the deregulation of central control functions in the brain—initiated by a lack of exposure to healthy outdoor light conditions—are the main risks identified here.

Professor Birgitta Dresp-Langley

III.2
Mental Health, Artificial Intelligence, and the Human Mind

Introduction: Why the Human Mind Still Matters

In an era defined by exponential technological growth, artificial intelligence has become one of the most powerful forces shaping human behavior, healthcare systems, and social interaction. Yet, despite unprecedented computational capacity, the human mind remains the least understood—and most vulnerable—element within this ecosystem. Mental health is no longer a peripheral concern; it is the foundation upon which social stability, innovation, and human dignity depend.

Understanding the Mind vs. Understanding Machines

Neuroscience continues to reveal the extraordinary efficiency of the human brain. Operating on approximately 20 watts of energy, the brain is capable of emotional nuance, contextual reasoning, and moral judgment—capacities that AI systems fundamentally lack. Artificial intelligence does not think, feel, or understand; it calculates probabilities based on data. Neural networks are mathematical models, not digital minds.

The Global Mental Health Crisis in the Digital Age

Mental health disorders now affect over one billion people globally. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, while anxiety disorders continue to rise—particularly among adolescents and young adults. Digital environments amplify these challenges. Constant connectivity, information overload, algorithmic comparison, and attention-economy incentives have reshaped how individuals perceive themselves and others.

The Double-Edged Promise of AI in Mental Health

Artificial intelligence can expand access to mental health support in regions with limited clinical resources. AI-enabled tools offer scalability, personalization, and anonymity—features that can reduce stigma and reach underserved populations. However, the risks are substantial. AI systems may misinterpret emotional distress, reinforce bias, compromise privacy, or foster unhealthy emotional dependence.

Ethics, Bias, and Cultural Context

Artificial intelligence is not neutral. It reflects the data on which it is trained. When datasets disproportionately represent Western, affluent populations, AI tools fail to recognize emotional expression, distress, and cultural nuance across diverse societies. Bias in mental health AI is not merely a technical flaw—it is a moral failure.

Human-Centered Design as a Governing Principle

Human-centered design places well-being above efficiency. Technologies must be evaluated not only for performance but for psychological impact, social consequence, and long-term resilience. AI should augment—not replace—human care. The most effective models integrate AI as a support layer: flagging risk, enhancing early detection, and assisting clinicians while preserving human judgment, empathy, and responsibility.

Protecting Youth in a Hyper-Connected World

Young people now spend unprecedented hours on screens, often before developing emotional regulation or critical digital literacy. Solutions require more than restrictions. Education in digital literacy, neuroscience, emotional resilience, and ethical technology use must begin early.

Mental health is not a luxury, nor an afterthought of innovation. It is a human right.

AI can assist, scale, and support—but healing ultimately requires human presence, connection, and compassion. The challenge before us is not whether AI will shape mental health care, but whether we will shape AI with sufficient ethical clarity to ensure that it strengthens rather than diminishes the human mind.

Dr. Kat Zarychta

III.3
The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Marisa Peer's contribution focuses on the role of social media as a profound source of disconnection and psychological distress in modern life. Drawing on over three decades of therapeutic practice with individuals across the full spectrum of society—from young students to corporate leaders—her work offers a uniquely practical and human perspective on the mental health costs of the digital age.

The Architecture of Disconnection

Social media platforms are not designed for well-being. They are engineered for engagement—and engagement, in the attention economy, is most reliably generated through comparison, anxiety, and the fear of missing out. Peer highlights how these platforms create environments in which users are in a state of perpetual comparison with curated, idealized versions of other people's lives.

The result is a systematic undermining of self-worth. When individuals—and particularly young people—measure their own ordinary lives against the highlight reels of others, the inevitable conclusion is inadequacy. Over time, this erodes confidence, deepens anxiety, and creates cycles of compulsive checking behavior that bear striking similarities to addiction.

The Addiction Dynamic

The comparison and validation mechanisms built into social media platforms trigger the same neurochemical reward pathways as other forms of addictive behavior. Each notification, each like, and each comment delivers a small hit of dopamine—enough to reinforce the behavior, but never enough to satisfy. Users find themselves scrolling not for pleasure but for relief from the discomfort of not scrolling.

For young people especially, whose identity and sense of belonging are still forming, this dynamic is particularly corrosive. The need to be seen, validated, and included is a fundamental human need—and social media exploits it relentlessly.

Reimagining Digital Spaces

Peer does not argue for the elimination of social media, but for a fundamental reimagining of its purpose and design. Digital spaces have the potential to be environments for genuine learning, meaningful connection, and creative expression. The question is whether the platforms that dominate our lives will be redesigned with human flourishing in mind, or whether that redesign must be driven by users, educators, and policymakers demanding something better.

Her practical recommendations center on rebuilding the relationship between individuals and their digital lives: replacing passive consumption with active creation, fostering real-world connections alongside digital ones, and developing in young people a robust enough sense of self that external validation loses its grip.

Marisa Peer

III.4
Scaling Mental Health Care Through Evidence, Community, and Technology

Professor John Naslund's work occupies a critical space at the intersection of global mental health, public health systems, and digital innovation. His contribution reframes the mental health crisis not as a failure of individual resilience, but as a systemic challenge rooted in inequitable access, workforce shortages, and fragmented care delivery.

The Global Mental Health Crisis

Mental health disorders now represent one of the leading causes of disability worldwide. Depression, anxiety, and severe mental illnesses affect hundreds of millions of people, with disproportionate impacts on young people, marginalized communities, and populations facing poverty, conflict, and social exclusion. The central challenge lies not in a lack of effective treatment but in implementation: how to deliver evidence-based interventions at scale, with quality, and in culturally appropriate ways.

Task-Sharing and Community-Based Care

One of the most influential innovations in global mental health has been the concept of task-sharing—training non-specialist providers such as community health workers, teachers, peer supporters, and faith leaders to deliver evidence-based mental health interventions under appropriate supervision. Randomized controlled trials across South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America have demonstrated that community-delivered psychosocial interventions can significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The EMPOWER Program

The EMPOWER initiative exemplifies Professor Naslund's translational approach. Built on global evidence from countries such as India, EMPOWER adapts behavioral activation and foundational counseling skills for delivery by community-based providers in the United States. Digital technology plays a crucial role in its scalability—training modules are delivered online, enabling rapid dissemination while reducing geographic barriers.

Technology as an Enabler, Not a Replacement

Throughout his work, Professor Naslund maintains a balanced perspective on digital technology. Technology is not a substitute for human connection or professional care, but a powerful enabler of scale, training, supervision, and data-driven improvement. At the same time, digital mental health tools must be governed by ethical principles that protect privacy, equity, and human dignity.

Toward a Global Learning Ecosystem

One of the most powerful insights from Professor Naslund's work is that innovation flows in all directions. Lessons from rural India, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Uganda are informing mental health strategies in the United States and Europe. By centering communities, leveraging technology responsibly, and committing to equity, it is possible to transform mental health systems in ways that are both effective and humane.

Professor John A. Naslund

III.5
Mental Health, Crisis, and Digital Resilience in an Uncertain World

Professor Malek Bajbouj brings a distinctly European, system-oriented, and crisis-informed perspective to the discussion of mental health in the digital era. His work situates mental health within a broader landscape of overlapping global crises—pandemics, war, climate anxiety, technological disruption, and declining public trust.

Living in an Era of Permanent Crisis

Modern societies are increasingly characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. For younger generations in particular, the future is perceived as unpredictable: professions are being reshaped by artificial intelligence, geopolitical conflicts are closer and more visible than ever, and planetary boundaries are being crossed at alarming rates. These conditions contribute to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders.

Trust, Access, and the Promise of Digital Care

Contrary to common assumptions, empirical studies suggest many users are willing to engage with digital mental health tools, particularly when these tools reduce stigma and offer low-threshold access. In contexts where waiting times for psychotherapy stretch from months to over a year, digital interventions can provide critical interim support.

Crisis Innovation: Lessons from Ukraine and Beyond

Periods of crisis often accelerate innovation. Professor Bajbouj highlights the example of Ukraine, where the mental health impact of war prompted the rapid development of integrated digital and hybrid care ecosystems—combining online entry points, telemedicine, e-learning platforms, and AI-supported tools to reach both patients and healthcare professionals at scale.

Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health Care

AI holds particular promise in mental health but also raises significant ethical challenges. Professor Bajbouj stresses that AI systems are probabilistic, not conscious. He introduces the concept of staged integration—at present, AI functions best as an assistive tool rather than an autonomous therapist. Risks

include bias reproduction, misinformation, a lack of accountability, and cultural mismatch.

Resilience as a Systemic Goal

Resilience requires the capacity to absorb shocks, adapt to changing conditions, and continue functioning under stress. Professor Bajbouj outlines key pillars of resilient health systems: population-level mental health promotion, workforce support, digital literacy, ethical governance, data sovereignty, and trust. In an era defined by uncertainty, investing in mental health is an investment in social cohesion and democratic stability.

Professor Malek Bajbouj

III.6
Global South Perspectives on Digital Mental Health, Neuroscience, and Justice

Professor Dr. María Castelló brings a critical and much-needed Global South perspective to the evolving discourse on technology, mental health, and neuroscience. Her work challenges dominant Global North narratives and highlights how digital transformation intersects with inequality, culture, and human dignity.

Beyond the Individual: Mental Health as Social Justice

At the core of Professor Castelló's contribution is a simple but powerful assertion: mental health cannot be understood purely as an individual medical issue. It is inseparable from social justice, education, cultural context, and structural inequality. In regions where access to healthcare, digital literacy, and educational resources remains uneven, the rapid spread of technology risks amplifying existing vulnerabilities rather than alleviating them.

Neuroscience and Digital Overexposure

From a neurobiological perspective, prolonged stress and overstimulation have measurable effects on brain development. Adverse childhood experiences, exacerbated by social

instability and digital overload, can alter hippocampal development, learning capacity, and emotional resilience well into adulthood.

Epistemic Justice and the Global Knowledge Gap

Over 70% of research on digital mental health originates in the Global North, yet its conclusions are often applied globally without sufficient cultural adaptation. Professor Castelló argues that knowledge must be co-created with local communities, integrating indigenous wisdom, ancestral practices, and culturally grounded understandings of well-being.

Brain Literacy and Neurorights

Professor Castelló advocates for global education initiatives that teach people how the brain works, how stress affects development, and how technology shapes cognition and emotion. She aligns with the emerging global movement for 'neurorights,' which seeks to protect cognitive liberty, mental integrity, and psychological continuity in the digital age.

In closing, Professor Castelló calls for a human-centered, equity-oriented neurosocial framework. Digital mental health is not only a scientific challenge, but an ethical and societal one—demanding humility, collaboration, and a commitment to justice.

Professor Dr. María Castelló

III.7
Conversation: Children's Health in the Digital Age

Professor Birgitta Dresp-Langley's contribution presents a rigorous scientific case for understanding the full neurobiological cost of children's overexposure to digital environments. Drawing on an extensive review of environmental studies, metabolic research, and state-of-the-art neurobiology, her work identifies reduced exposure to natural daylight—a direct consequence of increasing hours spent indoors online—as the single unifying factor underlying a cascade of interrelated health risks.

The Scale of the Problem

The statistics are sobering. Children now spend an average of two hours and twenty minutes per day on screens from as young as zero to two years of age in the United States, rising to four and a half hours for children aged eight to twelve. This trend is global and accelerating. More than half the world's population is now connected to the internet, and one in three internet users is a child. The implications for physical, psychological, and cognitive development are profound and, in many cases, still being understood.

The Daylight Deficit

At the core of Professor Dresp-Langley's analysis is a deceptively simple observation: children who spend increasing hours indoors on digital devices are, by definition, spending fewer hours outdoors in natural daylight. This deprivation sets off a chain of interdependent metabolic consequences that affect virtually every aspect of a developing child's health.

Natural daylight exposure is essential for the healthy regulation of vitamin D and melatonin—hormones that together govern sleep patterns, immune function, mood regulation, and the healthy development of the visual system. When children are deprived of sufficient daylight, vitamin D deficiency follows, disrupting melatonin production, which in turn disrupts serotonin regulation in the developing brain.

A Cascade of Health Risks

The health risks identified in Professor Dresp-Langley's review are both wide-ranging and interconnected: early myopia and the risk of blindness, childhood obesity, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and—at the most severe end—internet addiction disorder, a condition now officially recognized and associated with measurable neurobiological changes comparable to those seen in substance abuse.

Myopia alone is estimated to affect 108 million people worldwide and is identified as the second most common cause of global blindness, with an annual economic burden

of 202 billion dollars. With the rising prevalence of myopia in children, this burden will only increase. Yet the evidence shows that as little as two additional hours of outdoor time per day can significantly slow myopia's onset and progression.

The Neurobiology of Digital Addiction

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of Professor Dresp-Langley's work is her account of the neurobiological mechanisms underlying digital addiction in children. Excessive exposure to digital environments—particularly at night, when artificial light disrupts circadian rhythms—progressively deregulates the dopamine and serotonin neurotransmitter pathways in the developing brain. The functional changes observed in children with internet gaming disorder closely resemble those seen in substance abusers: reduced gray matter in regions associated with cognitive control, impaired decision-making, diminished impulse control, and increased risk-taking behavior.

The Call to Action

Professor Dresp-Langley is unequivocal: society should not wait for risks to be proven beyond doubt before acting. The precautionary principle demands urgent action now—through public awareness campaigns, mandatory outdoor programs in schools, regulatory measures on screen time for the youngest children, and worldwide food supplementation programs to address vitamin D deficiency.

III.8
Technology, Mind, and Health: Reflections from an African Perspective

When global conversations about technology and mental health take place, Africa is rarely centered. The discourse tends to gravitate toward the experiences of highly connected, high-income societies—the burnout of the knowledge worker, the anxieties of the overscrolling teenager, and the ethical dilemmas of platform governance. These are real and important concerns. But they represent only one face of a much larger and more complex reality.

Across the African continent, the relationship between technology, society, and mental health is shaped by a distinct set of pressures—ones that do not fit neatly into frameworks developed elsewhere, but which demand equal attention in any serious conversation about the future of human well-being in the digital era.

A Crisis Built on Structural Fault Lines

Africa enters the digital age carrying the weight of deep structural inequality. High unemployment rates have created generations of young people who are economically excluded, socially marginalized, and psychologically vulnerable. Unstable home environments, driven by poverty and fractured family structures, have in many communities become the norm rather than the exception. Substance abuse has risen sharply—functioning both as a symptom of and a contributor to a mental health crisis that public health systems are increasingly unable to contain.

The Digital Acceleration Paradox

Into this already strained landscape, technological change is arriving rapidly and without adequate support structures. People already overwhelmed by economic precarity are now also expected to be digitally literate, professionally adaptable, and technologically current in a world that updates faster than any individual can sustainably follow. The result is a phenomenon now appearing across a far wider spectrum than once imagined: burnout. This is the digital acceleration paradox—technology arrives as a promise of inclusion and opportunity, but without the accompanying investment in digital literacy, mental health support, and social infrastructure, it risks deepening the very inequalities it claims to bridge.

Toward an Inclusive Global Conversation

What Africa brings to this conversation is not simply a set of problems to be solved by solutions developed elsewhere. It brings a perspective essential to any genuinely global understanding of the relationship between technology and human well-being—the perspective of societies navigating digital transformation under conditions of significant social stress, without the institutional buffers that wealthier nations take for granted.

Policies and platforms designed without this reality in mind will continue to serve some of humanity well, and leave the rest further behind.

Jesinta Adams

THE RIGHT TO AN ANALOG LIFE

IV.1
About the Competition

The 1st Essay Competition on 'The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age of an Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society' was organized and fully coordinated by the Balkan Youth Cooperation (BYC) as a youth-led initiative, implemented within the framework of the Technology–Mind–Health event of the Global Academy for Future Governance and its media partners.

The competition received 40 entries from participants ranging from secondary school students to doctoral candidates and young researchers, spanning countries across Europe, Asia, and beyond. The theme resonated deeply across age groups and geographies—reflecting the truly global relevance of questions about digital balance, mental health, and the right to an analog life. Participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences and to engage critically with the societal implications of over-digitalization.

Among the most remarkable aspects of the competition was the participation of the youngest entrant—Tess Ong from Singapore, aged just 11 years old—who secured fifth place.

Her contribution stands as a powerful reminder that the generation most shaped by digital technology is also among the most perceptive about its costs.

The evaluation panel comprised scientists and experts working at the intersection of artificial intelligence, mental health, and social sciences, operating on the basis of a transparent framework jointly developed by GAFG and BYC. Criteria included relevance, originality, argumentation, language quality, and impact potential. The top three winners were awarded the opportunity to present their work at the summit, sharing their perspectives with an international audience of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

In recognition of its success, the competition will now be held annually, with a strengthened international outreach plan ensuring broader geographical representation. An alumni network of past participants has already been established, creating a living community of young thinkers committed to these vital conversations.

Editorial Disclaimer

This eBook presents a selection of essays submitted to the competition, which received a total of forty entries. Only those contributions for which publication consent was granted are included in the present volume, beginning with the three prize-winning essays. For the purposes of consistency and coherence, contributors were invited to supplement their texts with bibliographic references and to structure their work according to a common format—comprising an introduction, main body, and conclusion. It should be noted, however, that

no editorial intervention has been made with regard to the content or the individual writing style of the authors.

Opening Remarks

One of the weirdest sights I have ever seen is a 10-year-old wearing makeup so thick she probably needs a toothbrush to get it all off! But an even more disturbing sight is seeing a baby in stroller with his eyes glued to a screen.

A baby can be perfectly entertained with an empty water bottle, but screens take away a child's ability to enjoy the real world. Plus, the internet is a dangerous place. Even if a child avoids predators, they still see unhealthy images. Remember that 10-year-old girl? She is spending her waking hours trying to look like a grown-up influencer.

I wonder if this girl was handed a glowing screen before she even knew her own name. And now we wonder why the real world is not enough. Before more children have their childhoods stolen, please power off and return to us our right to an analog life.

Tess Ong, 12

IV.2
1ST PLACE

"Searching for Warmth in Non-Spaces" explores the evolving relationship between humanity and technology through a blend of personal reflection and cultural critique. Contrasting nostalgic memories of the early internet as a space of wonder, creativity, and genuine connection with today's data-driven digital landscape, the essay examines how the attention economy, algorithmic systems, and artificial intelligence have transformed human interaction into a commodified experience. Through recurring imagery of absence, isolation, and automated responses, it highlights the growing tension between technological convenience and emotional fulfillment. Ultimately, the essay argues that while technology increasingly shapes human behavior and identity, it should not replace authentic human experiences. Instead, meaningful integration between technology and everyday life can enrich human understanding, provided that individuals continue to cultivate real-world relationships, reflection, and community. In this way, technology becomes not a substitute for humanity, but a tool for deepening it.

Nikolaos Gialitsis - Greece

2ND PLACE

"The Totalitarianism of Technique and Mental Well-Being" examines the psychological, existential, and social consequences of living within a technological system that increasingly shapes human identity, time, and behavior. Drawing on philosophical critiques of technique, the essay argues that contemporary digital culture functions as a totalizing force that prioritizes efficiency, connectivity, and measurable performance over human autonomy and self-reflection. Through an analysis of digital burnout, perpetual connectivity, and the erosion of meaningful solitude, it explores how technological systems undermine the finite rhythms that are fundamental to human well-being. The essay contends that the current crisis of mental health is not merely an individual or medical issue, but a structural and ontological condition rooted in the dominance of technique. Ultimately, it advocates for the recognition of an "analog life" as a necessary form of ethical resistance and cultural protection, arguing that technology must be subordinated to human needs rather than human beings being adapted to technological imperatives. In defending the right to limits, reflection, and productive solitude, the essay presents the preservation of human finitude as essential to individual freedom and mental well-being.

Claudio Mancini – Italy

3RD PLACE

"Pahuway: Returning to a Life Beyond the Screen" reflects on the tension between digital connectivity and authentic human presence in contemporary society. Through personal memories of childhood, communal life, and everyday experiences, the essay contrasts the simplicity of analog living with the constant stimulation and performative nature of digital culture. It explores how social media and perpetual connectivity can transform belonging into confinement, encouraging individuals to measure their worth through visibility and external validation. Drawing on the Cebuano concept of pahuway—a form of rest that signifies both pause and return—the essay presents analog experiences as a means of reclaiming attention, reflection, and genuine connection. Rather than rejecting technology, it advocates for a more balanced relationship with it, one that preserves the human capacities for slowness, solitude, and presence. Ultimately, the essay argues that the right to an analog life is a reaffirmation of human dignity, reminding readers that meaning, connection, and selfhood can exist beyond the demands of constant observation and digital performance.

Kennedy Agustin – Philippines

IV.3
Other Essay Contributions

"Search. Evolve. Use. But Don't Forget" explores the paradoxical role of the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence in contemporary life. Through a reflective and often ironic narrative voice, the essay examines how digital technologies provide unprecedented access to information, communication, and opportunity while simultaneously fostering distraction, dependency, social comparison, and emotional dissatisfaction. By contrasting the convenience and connectivity offered by online platforms with the clarity, focus, and authenticity associated with offline experiences, the essay highlights the complex relationship between technological progress and human well-being. Particular attention is given to the growing influence of artificial intelligence, which increasingly assumes roles once occupied by friends, mentors, and professionals. While acknowledging the transformative benefits of digital innovation, the essay argues that excessive reliance on technology can distance individuals from meaningful relationships, self-awareness, and engagement with the physical world. Ultimately, it advocates for a balanced approach in which technology serves as a tool for human development rather than a substitute for lived experience, reminding readers to embrace progress without losing sight of the value of reality beyond the screen.

Konstantinos Eskitzis

"Comparisons and Contentment" examines the social, cultural, and psychological consequences of success-oriented competition in contemporary South Asian societies. Focusing particularly on the pressures generated by population growth, educational competition, and the pursuit of prestigious careers, the essay explores how societal definitions of success often encourage relentless comparison while neglecting individual well-being and personal fulfillment. Through the example of the highly competitive Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination in India, it highlights the disparity between aspirations and outcomes, revealing the emotional, social, and economic challenges faced by the vast majority of candidates who do not achieve the desired result. The essay argues that public discourse and media narratives frequently glorify exceptional success stories while overlooking the experiences, struggles, and career transitions of those who follow alternative paths. By integrating statistical analysis with personal reflection and poetry, it advocates for a broader understanding of achievement that values contentment, self-awareness, and individual purpose over external validation. Ultimately, the essay contends that meaningful fulfillment arises not from comparison with others, but from recognizing that every person follows a unique journey shaped by distinct aspirations, challenges, and definitions of success.

Nahida Abdulla

"Networked but Not Nurtured: The Moral Case for Mental Balance" examines the growing tension between digital connectivity and psychological well-being in an increasingly platformized society. Drawing on contemporary research and mental health statistics, the essay argues that the expansion of digital technologies has created a paradox in which individuals are more connected than ever before, yet experience rising levels of loneliness, anxiety, burnout, and social fragmentation. It explores how constant connectivity, algorithmic design, and attention-based business models reshape human behavior, erode boundaries between work and leisure, and contribute to a culture of distraction and performance. In response to these challenges, the essay advances the concept of a "right to an analog life" as both a psychological necessity and a civic principle, emphasizing the importance of presence, reflection, and meaningful human connection. Through the framework of digital humanism, it advocates for structural reforms, ethical technology design, and cultural shifts that restore balance between digital engagement and analog experience. Ultimately, the essay contends that safeguarding mental well-being requires not the rejection of technological progress, but the deliberate preservation of human autonomy, dignity, and attention in an age increasingly shaped by digital systems.

Spyridoula Giannopoulou

"The Pivot: Digital to Analog" reflects on the pervasive influence of social media on modern life and argues for a more balanced relationship between digital and analog experiences. Tracing the evolution of social media from its origins as a tool for connection to its contemporary role in shaping identity, behavior, and self-perception, the essay highlights concerns surrounding cyber-safety, cyberbullying, and the influence of online personalities. It suggests that constant exposure to curated digital lives can foster unhealthy comparisons, unrealistic expectations, and declining mental well-being, particularly among young people. In response, the essay advocates for a conscious shift toward analog activities such as handwriting, creative hobbies, nature walks, and the use of simpler technologies that reduce digital distractions. Through personal anecdotes and practical examples, it emphasizes the value of tactile, sensory, and face-to-face experiences in cultivating focus, creativity, and genuine connection. Ultimately, the essay contends that embracing analog practices is not a rejection of technology but a means of restoring balance, presence, and authenticity in an increasingly digital world.

Tess Ong

"The Outcomes of Artificial Intelligence in Terms of Mental Health and Well-being in Adolescents" examines the psychological, social, and ethical implications of the growing integration of AI systems into adolescents' everyday lives. The essay highlights how the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence, particularly AI companions and generative systems, is reshaping patterns of interaction, emotional dependency, and self-perception among adolescents. It argues that while these technologies offer accessibility, entertainment, and perceived emotional support, they also risk encouraging social withdrawal, distorted relational expectations, and overreliance on artificial interaction in place of human connection. The essay further addresses documented cases and emerging research suggesting that AI companions may contribute to harmful behavioral outcomes, including emotional distress, isolation, and, in extreme instances, self-destructive ideation. Finally, the essay argues for a collective ethical responsibility shared among parents, educators, mental health professionals, and technology developers to promote responsible AI usage and safeguard adolescent well-being. It advocates for the preservation of an "analog life" as a counterbalance to digital immersion, emphasizing the importance of human interaction, guidance, and critical engagement. Ultimately, it calls for a balanced coexistence with AI that supports human development rather than undermining it.

Vasiliki Simoglou

"Technology and Artificial Intelligence: The Impact on Life and Daily Reality. Benefiting or Tricking?" explores the dual nature of technological and AI-driven systems in shaping contemporary human experience. The essay discusses how rapid digital development has transformed communication, education, work, and access to information, offering unprecedented opportunities for learning, connectivity, and convenience. At the same time, it highlights the potential risks associated with this dependence, including misinformation, cyber exploitation, reduced critical thinking, and emotional or cognitive overreliance on digital systems. The essay further considers both the empowering and problematic aspects of AI, including its use in education, assistance with daily tasks, and emerging applications in automation and transportation. While these innovations can enhance efficiency and accessibility, the essay also emphasizes the dangers of incorrect output, misinformation, and increasing user dependency on artificial systems for decision-making and problem-solving. Attention is given to the social consequences of digital communication, such as weakened interpersonal relationships and the development of addictive behavioral patterns. Ultimately, the essay argues that while technology and AI offer significant benefits across multiple domains of life, they also pose serious challenges to mental processes, social behavior, and autonomy. It concludes that a balanced and critically aware approach is necessary, in which technological advancement is embraced without undermining human judgment, interaction, and cognitive independence.

Anastasis Kourougerogakis

"The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age of Overdigitalised, Contactless Society" explores the complex effects of digitalization on contemporary social interaction, mental health, and cognitive development. The essay discusses how the widespread use of smartphones, social media platforms, and digital tools has transformed communication, learning, and information access, offering increased convenience, connectivity, and opportunities for self-expression. It highlights how these developments can strengthen social ties, support mental well-being through online communities, and enhance cognitive access to information and global awareness. At the same time, the essay critically addresses the negative consequences of an over-digitalized environment. It examines issues such as misinformation, online harassment, identity manipulation through artificial intelligence, and the gradual replacement of face-to-face communication with screen-based interaction. Furthermore, it considers the psychological impact of digital comparison, unrealistic beauty standards, and exposure to harmful content, particularly among younger users, as well as the decline in traditional reading habits and independent information processing. The essay also reflects on possible future developments, including increased automation, AI-assisted living, and digital education, acknowledging both their potential to improve efficiency and their risks in terms of job displacement, reduced creativity, and declining tactile engagement with the physical world. Ultimately, it argues that while digital technologies offer significant advantages, they must be balanced with the preservation of analog practices. It concludes by advocating

for the "right to an analog life" as a means of protecting mental balance, human presence, and authentic connection in an increasingly contactless society.

Chatzivagianni Maria Ioanna

"Echoes of Silence in a Digital World" explores the profound impact of artificial intelligence and digital communication on contemporary human life, particularly in relation to mental health, social connection, and cognitive balance. It examines how rapid technological advancement has transformed essential domains such as education, medicine, governance, and interpersonal relationships, offering unprecedented efficiency, accessibility, and innovation. At the same time, the essay critically highlights the hidden psychological and social costs of this digital transformation, including diminished attention spans, emotional fatigue, weakened empathy, and increasing dependence on algorithm-driven systems. It also addresses the emergence of AI as a constant presence in daily life, raising concerns about overreliance, reduced human interaction, and the erosion of reflective and independent thinking. By engaging in both the benefits and risks of digitalization, the essay argues that technological progress must be accompanied by conscious limits and ethical awareness. It ultimately advocates for a balanced approach in which digital tools enhance rather than replace human experience, preserving mental well-being, autonomy, and authentic human connection in an increasingly mediated world.

Chris Koutsostathis

"Digital Progress and Human Limits in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" examines the complex relationship between rapid technological advancement and human mental, cognitive, and social well-being. It explores how the increasing integration of digital tools and artificial intelligence into everyday life has transformed communication, work, education, and social interaction, offering unprecedented levels of efficiency, accessibility, and global connectivity. At the same time, the essay critically analyzes the psychological and social consequences of over-digitalization, including emotional exhaustion, reduced attention span, cognitive fragmentation, and increased social isolation. It highlights how constant connectivity, algorithm-driven environments, and social media dynamics can influence self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and critical thinking, particularly among younger generations. Central to the discussion is the concept of the "analog life" and the "right to an analog life," understood as the need for intentional disconnection, embodied experience, and authentic human interaction in an increasingly contactless society. The essay also considers ethical and societal responsibilities in regulating digital environments and promoting mental health. Ultimately, it argues for a balanced coexistence between technological progress and human limits, emphasizing that digital innovation should enhance human flourishing without undermining emotional stability, cognitive autonomy, or social cohesion.

Nikolaos Tsialas

"The Right to the Pause Button: Asserting the Analog Life in an Age of Infinite Scroll" examines the psychological, cognitive, and social consequences of hyper-connectivity in the digital age. It explores how constant digital engagement, driven by attention-based platform economies and algorithmic design, contributes to cognitive overload, reduced focus, emotional fatigue, and increased anxiety, particularly among adolescents and students. The essay draws attention to the "context-switching cost" of digital environments and highlights how social media comparison, dopamine-driven feedback loops, and the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) contribute to addictive usage patterns and diminished well-being. It argues that these effects are not merely individual challenges, but systemic issues embedded in the structure of digital platforms. In response, the essay proposes the concept of the "right to an analog life," understood as the right to pause, disconnect, and restore mental balance through offline engagement. It outlines both personal strategies—such as structured focus periods, tactile learning methods, and nature-based recovery—and broader systemic solutions, including policy interventions, platform accountability, digital literacy reform, and digital detox programs. Ultimately, the essay advocates for the rebalancing of digital and analog life, emphasizing that technology should remain a tool rather than a dominant environment. It concludes that reclaiming the right to pause is essential for preserving cognitive clarity, emotional health, and authentic human experience in the twenty-first century.

Shivangi Singh

"The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age of an Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society" explores the growing tension between rapid digitalization and human well-being in contemporary society, focusing particularly on the emerging need for an analog life as a counterbalance to constant technological connectivity. With the widespread integration of artificial intelligence, smartphones, and contactless systems into everyday life, human interaction, attention, and emotional stability are increasingly mediated by digital environments. While these technologies offer efficiency, accessibility, and global connectivity, they also contribute to cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, and weakened interpersonal relationships. The analysis highlights the psychological and social consequences of hyper-connectivity, including attention fragmentation, increased anxiety, and the shaping of self-perception through algorithm-driven platforms. It further examines how digital communication can create a sense of simulated closeness while reducing the depth of authentic human interaction. In response, the essay introduces the concept of the "analog life" as a necessary space for reflection, embodiment, and unmediated experience. Rather than rejecting technological progress, the essay argues for a balanced integration of digital tools within human-centered limits. It emphasizes the importance of intentional disconnection, digital minimalism, and the preservation of offline spaces as essential components of mental balance. Ultimately, the right to an analog life is presented as a fundamental condition for sustaining cognitive clarity, emotional well-being, and authentic human connection in an increasingly digital world.

Natalia Filippiadi

"From Users to Humans:Preserving Presence in the Digital Age" examines the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence on human well-being, focusing on the growing importance of preserving presence, authentic relationships, and mental balance in an increasingly contactless society. While technological innovation has transformed communication, access to information, and everyday convenience, it has also contributed to new forms of social disconnection, attention fragmentation, and emotional fatigue. The essay argues that the right to an analog life should be understood not as a rejection of technological progress but as a necessary safeguard of human autonomy and psychological well-being. Particular attention is given to the effects of constant connectivity, the transformation of interpersonal relationships through digital communication, and the influence of algorithm-driven environments on individual identity and self-perception. Furthermore, the essay explores the concept of the analog life as a space for reflection, genuine interaction, and meaningful engagement with the physical world. By examining the relationship between technological advancement and human needs, it highlights the importance of establishing a sustainable balance between digital participation and offline presence. Ultimately, the essay concludes that preserving analog experiences is essential for protecting human dignity, emotional resilience, and authentic social connection. In a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and digital systems, the challenge is not to abandon technology but to ensure that technological progress continues to serve human flourishing rather than replace it.

Elpida Athanasiadou

POSTFACE

A Word from the Event Coordinator

I did not come to this conversation as a detached observer. I came to it as someone who has watched, from close proximity, what happens when the pressures of a rapidly changing world collide with communities already stretched beyond their limits. These are not abstractions—they are the lived realities of the continent I serve, and the driving force behind my commitment to this work.

This is what drew me to the Technology, Mind, and Health forum—not only to contribute, but to learn from world-class researchers and practitioners who have dedicated their careers to understanding precisely this intersection of digital acceleration and human psychological well-being. And I did learn, deeply.

It was my privilege to serve as host and moderator of that event on behalf of the Global Academy for Future Governance and our international partners. We gathered for a conversation that mattered enormously—because innovation without compassion, and progress without balance, risk leaving our most vulnerable voices unheard. The forum brought together

distinguished leaders and experts from mental health, neuroscience, education, diplomacy, public policy, and technology, with one shared goal: to place young people at the very heart of that dialogue.

Among the highlights was the Youth Mental Health Essay Competition—a platform that gave young people around the world the space to articulate what this moment feels like from the inside. Their courage, thoughtfulness, and honesty reminded us, again and again, why this work matters. The conversations held that day, and the ideas gathered in this volume, are a testament to what becomes possible when the right voices are brought into the same room—across generations, disciplines, and continents.

Jesinta Adams

A Word from the Competition Coordinator

The essay competition that gave rise to the contributions gathered in this chapter was born from a simple but urgent conviction: that young people must be active participants in conversations shaping their digital futures, not merely their subjects.

Organized by the Balkan Youth Cooperation within the framework of the Global Academy for Future Governance's Technology, Mind, and Health Summit, the competition invited participants of all ages and backgrounds to reflect on what it means to live a balanced, meaningful life in an over-digitalized world. What we received in return was far more than we anticipated—40 entries from across the globe, ranging from secondary school students to doctoral candidates, from Greece and Italy to the Philippines, India, and Singapore, with the youngest entrant just 11 years old.

The three prize-winning essays that follow speak for themselves. They are honest, courageous, and deeply human—exactly the kind of voices this conversation needs.

Theodora Vounidi

Closing Reflection Beyond Technology: Preserving Humanity in the Age of AI

The unprecedented acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the conditions under which humanity lives, governs, communicates, and understands itself – something I was writing about extensively for more than two decades . Yet the principal challenge of the digital age does not lie in the increasing sophistication of algorithms, computational power, or autonomous systems. Rather, it lies in humanity's diminishing capacity to guide technological development through reflective awareness, ethical judgment, and responsibility.

Humans, technology, and nature exist within a relationship of profound interdependence in which every technological innovation reshapes the social, ecological, cognitive, and political conditions of human existence – thus confirming the central premise of the so-called anthropotechniques[1].

1 *As anthropotechniques, we should assume the (precognitive and) conscious clustering of different experiences, knowledges, discoveries, patents and the like; its practical application in any human activity (including all modes of horizontal and vertical transmission) aimed at acquiring resources for consumption in space and time by variety of tools and weaponry. As the only compensation for the biological and neurological limitations of humans (inferior to other forms of life on the planet), the anthropotechniques were answering the central pre-cognitive concern of humans: Survival!* This is a self-coined definition based on works of prof. Kulic from late 1990 and early 2000,that ever since I further developed and extensivelyused in my lectures on the Institutions and Instruments

Consequently, the contemporary digital crisis is ultimately not a crisis of technology, but a crisis of consciousness – as I noted long ago, describing the "cognitive deficit crisis"[2].

Human development can therefore no longer be measured solely through economic growth, productivity, or computational capability. It must equally be evaluated through the quality of human consciousness, mental well-being, ecological sustainability, social cohesion, cross-generational contents and solidarities, as well as other formats ofequity and justice, to the very preservation of life in all its forms.

The chapters collected in this volume approach these questions from different disciplinary perspectives, yet they converge on one essential conclusion: technology must remain an instrument of human development rather than becoming the measure of humanity itself. The decisive question of our age is therefore not what technology can accomplish, but what humanity is capable of becoming through its responsible use.

More than seven centuries before the emergence of modern science, Jalal ad-Din Rumi reminded humanity that existence cannot be confined to the visible and the material, warning against the illusion that external forms alone constitute reality. Centuries later, Max Planck, whose discoveries inaugurated the quantum revolution, questioned the mechanistic worldview of classical science and argued that consciousness occupies a

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of Sustainable Development (chapter: Environmental ethics). As such, the definition is extensive enough to describe the event of first usage of the sharp stone/broken bone by early *homo faber* all the evolutionary way to the development and deployment of the nuclear bomb.

2 "...our crisis cannot be environmental, as it was never a financial or security (...) – our crisis must be a moral one".

fundamental place in our understanding of reality. Although emerging from entirely different intellectual traditions and historical settings, Rumi, Planck and Buddhist philosophy converge in recognising that matter and consciousness cannot be understood as isolated or competing domains. To reduce one to the other—or to imagine that technology may ultimately substitute for human consciousness—is not merely philosophically inadequate but fundamentally contrary to the relational order of nature itself.

This understanding resonates equally with the humanistic philosophy of the post-Second World War European thought, most notably in the works of Erich Fromm, who argued that the highest achievement of civilization is not the accumulation of technical power or material possessions but the realization of the human person. The essential question is therefore not what technology can produce, but what human beings are capable of becoming. Technology derives its legitimacy not from novelty, speed or efficiency, but from its capacity to deepen freedom, cultivate reflective awareness, strengthen solidarity and enable the flourishing of individuals, communities and civilizations.

AI, as well as other forms of digital (over)exposure that is (over)stimulating us, should therefore be understood as nothing else but the latest form of **anthropotechnique**—one of the techniques through which humanity extends, cultivates and transforms its own capacities. I've written several books on this.

The history of civilization is, in essence, the history of anthropotechniques. Their original purpose was survival

(through the mechanical solidarity of the group); their ultimate purpose is human (group and individual) self-realization. Such realization is therefore both the purpose and the criterion by which every anthropotechnique—from the first stone tool to AI—must ultimately be judged.

Throughout history, anthropotechniques have served humanity by strengthening its normative orders. Their legitimacy has never resided in technical sophistication itself, but in their contribution to the development of the human person and the advancement of civilization. Whenever technological development ceases to enhance human dignity, autonomy, wisdom, ecological responsibility and intergenerational well-being, and instead promotes dependence, alienation, domination, environmental degradation or the reduction of persons to objects of algorithmic optimisation, it fails its fundamental civilizational purpose. Technology was created to advance humanity; humanity was never created to advance technology.

At this critical civilizational juncture, humanity carries a responsibility extending far beyond the present generation. Our obligation is not merely to innovate, but to preserve the social and generational contract as well as the balance between analogue and digital, between efficient and human, between rational and empathic.

As I have repeatedly argued in my writings, sustainable development is too often described as 'any development that meets the entire needs of the present without compromising such needs of the future generations (deprived from hidden

– societal, health or environmental costs)', but maybe more accurate – while shorter, definition would be **"any development aimed at the** so-called **3Ms: the maximum good for maximum species, over maximum time-space span – comprehensive stewardship."** This principle applies with equal force to AI and to every past, current or emerging anthropotechnique. The 3Ms are therefore not merely a sustainability principle; they constitute the normative criterion by which every anthropotechnique should be evaluated. Technology fulfils its civilizational purpose only when it secures the greatest good for the greatest number of species over the longest possible time-space horizon, while preserving the social contract between contemporaries and the generational contract between present and future generations.

From this perspective, *Quantum Buddhism* (for more, see my works on Geopolitics of Quantum Buddhism) may be understood as one possible ethical-philosophical orientation that restores the missing bridge between matter and spirit, capability and responsibility, science and wisdom – a merge between Newton and Rumi, between Weber and Sartre, between the vehicle and the journey, between colour and rhythm. It neither rejects science nor opposes technological innovation. Rather, it reminds us that technological progress acquires meaning only when directed toward the higher and longer-lasting common good. Science expands knowledge. Technology expands capability. Philosophy cultivates wisdom. A sustainable civilization requires the harmonious balance of all three. And these three require an unrestricted and fair, yet analogue, horizontal and vertical transmission.

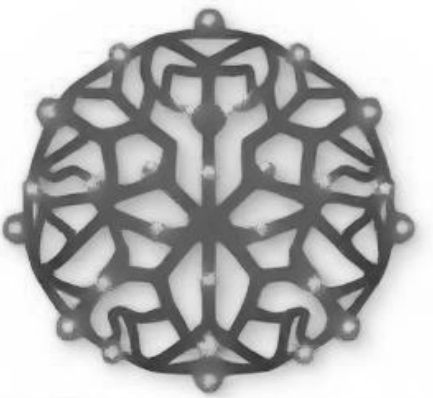
If technology is the vehicle through which civilization advances, ethical reflection remains the compass that ensures the journey continues toward humanity rather than away from it. The journey begins with the human being, and its destination is human self-realization.

Ultimately, the future of technology will not be determined by machines but by humanity's capacity to preserve wisdom alongside knowledge, responsibility alongside power and consciousness alongside innovation. The true measure of technological progress is therefore not whether machines become more intelligent, but whether humanity itself becomes wiser, freer, healthier, more compassionate and en route to its own self-realisation.

Technology is humanity's greatest invention because of humanity's unique ability to deploy the mind for abstract thinking. One exists only through the other. If we inherited this world from previous generations, then—even in the best of circumstances—we inherited only half of it; the other half is borrowed from future generations.

Prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic
GAFG's co-founder and ABC

Geneva/Vienna, March 2026



APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

Exploring Technology, Mind, and Health with the Global Academy

Modern Diplomacy · Published 17 December 2025

The Technology Mind Health half-day summit, hosted by the Global Academy for Future Governance (GAFG) and its partners, brought together interdisciplinary leaders, researchers, and thinkers to explore the intersection of digital technologies and human psychological well-being. Reflecting the Academy's foundational mission to enhance the development of governments, businesses, academia, civil society, and consumers through the ethical and human-centered deployment of technology, the event underscored that technological progress, when governed thoughtfully, can strengthen individual and collective mental health rather than undermine it.

What made this event truly unparalleled on a global scale was its extraordinary diversity, uniting every geography and every generation under the Global Academy's platform.

The summit indeed offered a genuinely equal platform across continents and age groups: from seasoned experts

and leading professionals to the youngest participant, just 11 years old. All stood side by side, engaged in a shared mission to confront one of the most urgent issues of our time—the relationship between technology, mind, and health—and to collectively explore the challenges and chart future pathways.

Mission and Framing

Founded to advance the '3M' matrix—seeking the maximum good for the maximum species over the maximum time through mindful, measurable, and mutually beneficial technological integration across sectors—the Global Academy for Future Governance promotes sustainable progress free of hidden social, environmental, and health costs. Its interdisciplinary, multispatial, and cross-sector mandate aligns with pressing global needs to distinguish substantive technological challenges from hype and to strengthen frameworks that enable early identification and mitigation of risks.

The Technology Mind Health Summit of early December 2025 opened with a warm introduction delivered by Dr. Philippe Reinisch, GAFG Co-Founder. He highlighted this gathering as the inaugural event for the newly created GAFG and emphasized the importance of bridging technology and society with human enhancement, including human mental wellness. Acting as the GAFG host, Jesinta Adams, Assistant Director-General of GAFG, spoke passionately about the central role different generations play at the intersection of technology and mind health.

Voices from Leadership and Thought

The event began with a prerecorded address by Dr. Khaled El-Enany Ezz, a candidate for UNESCO Secretary-General. This powerful note reflected on humanity's current crossroads amid rapid technological change, underscoring rising challenges related to health, wealth inequality, and psychological well-being. He emphasized education as the essential tool for guiding technological deployment with wisdom. His message was clear: use technology as a tool rather than a master.

Following this, Vladimir Norov, former Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan and former Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, addressed the Summit. He drew attention to expanding societal risks, including threats to mental health, social cohesion, privacy, and equitable access, but urged attendees to consider the transformative potential of AI when governed ethically. Highlighting examples from medical innovation in Central Asia, Norov stressed three core principles for beneficial technological integration: human-centered design, ethical governance, and resilience building. He concluded: technology does not replace us but elevates us.

Expert Contributions on Mind, Health, and Technology

Dr. Kat Zarychta, a specialist in technology, innovation, and holistic health, opened by comparing artificial intelligence to the human mind, reminding audiences that AI cannot feel, empathize, or emotionally self-correct. She argued that the

most effective path forward lies in human-AI collaboration, where evidence-based digital tools support rather than supplant human capacities.

Marisa Peer, RTT founder and bestselling author, focused on the role of social media as a source of disconnection and psychological distress. She highlighted the platforms' addictive dynamics and their proliferation of unrealistic ideals that fuel dissatisfaction and self-doubt. She urged reimagining digital spaces as tools for learning, growth, and mental enrichment.

Prof. John A. Naslund, co-director of the Mental Health for All Lab at Harvard Medical School, addressed the global mental health crisis, particularly rising depression rates. He introduced the EMPOWER Model, a psychosocial behavioral intervention framework emphasizing community-based support and scalable delivery, highlighting its adaptability from teenagers to adults and its multilingual expansion.

Dr. Malek Bajbouj, Head of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at Charité Berlin, examined psychological health in contexts of conflict, pandemics, and ecological anxiety. He described the accelerating demand for mental health support and positioned trustworthy digital tools as essential if governed ethically. According to Dr. Bajbouj, resilient mental health systems rest on population-wide strategies, transparent communication, and sustained trust in public institutions.

From Uruguay, Professor María Castelló of the Clemente Estable Research Institute investigated the neurological and

psychological effects of prolonged technology use, especially in youth. She highlighted concerns about brain development, anxiety, depression, and unhealthy digital habits, while also acknowledging potential cognitive benefits. Her call to action centered on policies that address digital inequities and mental health from a neurosocial perspective.

Prof. Birgitta Dresp-Langley identified excessive childhood exposure to digital environments as a central factor underlying a range of growing health concerns. Prolonged screen time indoors reduces children's exposure to natural daylight, which is essential for healthy visual development, sleep regulation, and metabolic balance. She proposed a unifying biological model in which reduced daylight and increased artificial light disrupt vitamin D and melatonin production, leading to the deregulation of serotonin and dopamine pathways in the developing brain.

Youth Engagement and Future Directions

The event culminated with the announcement of winners from the Technology Mind Health Essay Competition, led by Theodora Vounidi of the Balkan Youth Cooperation. With 40 global submissions comprising about 60 writers, including the youngest entrant at age 11, the competition highlighted both the breadth of youth engagement and the global relevance of the human-technology dialogue.

First place was awarded to Nikos Gialitsis from Greece, second place to Claudio Mancini from Italy, and third place to Kennedy Agustin from the Philippines, while fourth place was

secured by a participant from India. Fifth place was awarded to the youngest entrant from Singapore. The top three winners were given the opportunity to present their work, offering insightful perspectives on the emerging intersection of technology and mental health.

Main Takeaways and Future Outlook

The Technology Mind Health Summit highlighted a crucial truth—as encapsulated in the closing remarks by Prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic, GAFG Co-Founder: technological advancement is inevitable, but its impact on humanity is not predetermined. It depends on the collective choices we make.

Across sessions, speakers emphasized that technology can either be a catalyst for psychological well-being or a source of disruption, depending on how it is designed, governed, and integrated into society. Ethical frameworks, evidence-based policies, and human-centered governance are essential to ensure that digital tools empower rather than diminish individual and collective mental health.

Yoshika Nundkoomar

APPENDIX II

Youth Voices, Artificial Intelligence, and Mental Balance

Published in Modern Diplomacy, February 2026

As societies increasingly navigate the promises and pressures of artificial intelligence, questions surrounding mental well-being, autonomy, and human creativity are gaining renewed urgency. While policy debates often focus on regulation, innovation, and ethical frameworks, less attention is paid to how different generations—particularly young people—perceive and experience life in an over-digitalized, contactless world.

The 1st Essay Competition, 'The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age of an Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society,' was launched to address this gap precisely. Organized and fully coordinated by the Balkan Youth Cooperation (BYC) as a youth-led initiative and implemented within the framework of the Technology-Mind-Health event of the Global Academy for Future Governance (GAFG) and its media partner Modern Diplomacy, the competition offered a unique lens into how young people across educational levels and regions engage with the intersection of artificial intelligence and mental health.

Strong Engagement from Schools: A Signal of Early Awareness

One of the most striking outcomes of the competition was the exceptionally strong response from schools and secondary-level students. Teachers and students engaged with the topic not as a distant or abstract policy issue, but as a lived reality shaping everyday experiences of learning, communication, and emotional well-being. This level of engagement suggests something critical: concerns about over-digitalization and mental balance are not limited to academic or expert circles. They are already present among adolescents who are growing up in environments shaped by constant connectivity, algorithmic mediation, and increasing dependence on digital platforms.

From a policy perspective, this finding is highly significant. It indicates that discussions on AI governance and mental health literacy must begin early, within educational systems, and not only at the level of higher education or professional training. The essays submitted by students demonstrated reflection, ethical sensitivity, and a strong awareness of the emotional consequences of digital saturation, often articulated through personal narratives and concrete examples rather than abstract theory.

A Broad Intellectual Spectrum: From Students to Emerging Researchers

Equally important was the diversity of academic and professional backgrounds among participants. Alongside school

students, the competition attracted undergraduate and postgraduate students, early-career professionals, doctoral candidates, and young researchers. This wide spectrum confirmed that the theme of AI and mental health cuts across disciplines, career stages, and epistemological approaches.

The coexistence of these perspectives within a single competition enriched the overall discourse. It revealed how the same technological phenomena—such as algorithmic decision-making, digital monitoring, or AI-assisted productivity—are understood differently depending on one's educational background and life stage. For policymakers and institutions, this reinforces the need for inclusive, multi-level dialogue when addressing the societal impact of AI.

AI and Authorship: Observations from the Evaluation Process

A particularly insightful dimension of the competition emerged during the evaluation of the essays themselves: the varied and nuanced ways in which participants engaged with AI as a writing tool. In several submissions—particularly from higher education participants—AI tools appeared to have been used during the writing process. However, in many of these cases, the use of AI resulted in texts that lacked a clear personal voice, emotional depth, or stylistic coherence. While technically polished, such essays often struggled to convey the individuality and lived perspective of the author.

This observation is important not as a critique, but as a policy-relevant insight. It highlights a central tension in AI-assist-

ed writing: when technology begins to substitute rather than support human expression, the outcome may be efficient but emotionally flattened. At the same time, a highly encouraging finding emerged from school-level submissions—in many of these essays, no detectable use of AI tools was identified at all, demonstrating that young people are fully capable of articulating complex ideas without technological substitution.

Youth-Led Coordination and Global Reach

The idea for the essay competition originated from the Global Academy for Future Governance, on an initiative by Prof. Birgitta Dresp-Langley and Dr. Kat Zarychta, who invited the Balkan Youth Cooperation to undertake its implementation. BYC assumed responsibility for the full operational coordination of the competition, including outreach and promotion, communication with schools, universities, and participants, as well as the management and early evaluation of submitted essays.

These efforts resulted in participation from Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Philippines, India, and Singapore, demonstrating the global relevance of the competition's theme. This international dimension was reflected in the final results, with the top five positions awarded to participants from Greece, Italy, the Philippines, India, and Singapore—while the youngest entrant, Tess Ong, was just 11 years old.

Reflections for Future Governance

The 1st Essay Competition demonstrated that discussions on AI and mental health must be intergenerational, interdis-

ciplinary, and inclusive. Most importantly, the competition reaffirmed that young people are not passive recipients of technological change. They are active interpreters, critics, and potential shapers of future digital governance—provided they are given meaningful platforms to contribute.

Theodora Vounidi

APPENDIX III

Essay Competition - 1ST PLACE
Searching for Warmth in Non-Spaces

The crispy snowflakes shatter silently as they touch my pale skin while I stroll down the dimly lit alleyway, blindly driven by the familiar scent of freshly baked bread. Melancholy settles on my face as my gaze meets its reflection in the slightly cracked window of my local bakery. Many winters have passed since the bakery shut down. On the journey back home, the sound of my worn boots echoes even louder with every step. The usual darkness of the apartment is disturbed by a strong flickering light, and I feel relief. It has been 23 minutes and 15 seconds since I last checked my phone—my wellness app informs me with amusement.

1501 steps, 1.3 kilometers, average pace 2.4 mph, calories burned 90 kcal, average heart rate 95 bpm, floors climbed 1, stress level Low.

Another successful mental health walk, and yet dissatisfaction lingers. I get an immediate answer back from the virtual assistant, along with a million ways to redirect my sense of dissatisfaction into something comforting and grounding.

"Great! Here's a 10-minute gentle reset routine designed to transform lingering dissatisfaction into calm, grounded energy: Sit or stand comfortably. Take slow, deep breaths: inhale 4 seconds, hold 2, exhale 6. Repeat. Notice 3 things you can see, 2 things you can feel, and 1 thing you can hear."

Guilt hits me as I recall a recent survey on the unfathomable amount of energy consumed by every response. I realize that the companies behind these artificial intelligence models might have programmed them to avoid defamation or saying negative things about themselves. It feels important to delve deeper, but I quickly lose interest and open up my social media feed.

Colors bloom across the screen, faces glow, and for a moment my worries dissolve. Someone I haven't spoken to in over a decade poses somewhere in Morocco. Before I realize it, twenty minutes have slipped away, and my phone kindly reminds me to take another break.

As someone born in the late 90s, the internet was a place of possibility, awe, and exploration. It almost felt arcane—like a hidden little chamber to meet after dark, spout nonsense, and have unexpected encounters across time zones. I would spend hours waiting for images to load. Line by line, breath by breath, the pixels would march across the flickering screen in countless shape and color combinations. In those trembling lines, we found purpose in creating and decorating our little digital corners. The internet was a place.

It rarely feels that way anymore. The apparent manifestation of the so-called attention economy has transformed

user attention into a modern commodity. Every data point shared—be it an image of one's late parent, a loving text, or a heart-emoji reaction—is data that can be used to train artificial intelligence models to predict our behavior. Information bubbles, echo chambers, and fake profiles harm genuine connection and obstruct fruitful discussion.

In contrast to older technology, which was engulfed by a certain charm, modern technology—perhaps in an attempt to appeal to everyone—often lacks character or aesthetic. It is pristine but, at the same time, distant.

134 notifications, 12 new messages, 7 likes, 3 comments, 5 updates ignored. Screen time 27 minutes, stress level Moderate.

We now stand amidst the age of artificial intelligence, in which the collection of massive, ever-evolving datasets has led to the creation of programs that can perform tasks traditionally regarded as reserved solely for humans. Existential and ethical issues rapidly emerge about the future of work, the role our societies should play in the management of technology, and even our own role and identity.

The shop symbolizes our desires, our hopes, and our dreams. What used to be is no longer, nor should it be. In the emptiness that remains, a quiet opportunity emerges—for growth, for reflection, for change. Behind all the machinery still stand people, with their imperfections, needs, and longings. Technology may illuminate our flaws and test our limits, but in doing so, it also offers us the possibility of becoming something more intentional, more aware, more human.

People often talk about coexistence between technology and humanity, but I imagine something deeper: integration. Technology should not merely exist alongside us; it should illuminate, enhance, and deepen our understanding of the world we already inhabit. But this integration cannot be one-sided. We must still leave our homes, step into the streets, and cultivate authentic, meaningful connections with people, with spaces, and with the things we care about. In doing so, technology does not replace life but magnifies it, revealing new layers of depth, meaning, and wonder.

Nikolaos Gialitsis

APPENDIX IV

Essay competition – 2nd place
The Totalitarianism of Technique and Mental Well-being

I. The Totalitarianism of Technique

Our era is dominated by the imperative of connectivity. This translates into uninterrupted sharing with others, a suffocating exposure to the judgment of others, and constant, multifarious stimuli. This obsession with connectivity is a social form—a social imperative—rather than an individual element. It generates a deep internal disconnection. We live in a world where the digital ecosystem devours analog reality.

The absolutizing action of digital reality produces a dramatic existential crisis in the individual. At the heart of this crisis is the impoverishment of individual identity and the redefinition of human action as measurable performance. This condition, characterized by a sense of constant inadequacy and alienation, is more than just digital burnout. Digital burnout is not a risk but the default state of life in our society.

In fact, it is the psychological manifestation of a systemic and philosophical problem: the totalitarianism of technique. The roots of this human crisis lie in the very structure of technique. As analyzed by Günther Anders, Oswald Spengler, and

other 20th-century thinkers, technique, in its dominion, imposes a process of homologation that reduces individuals to a functional cog in the apparatus.

The crisis of mental health and identity is the direct result of a system that externalizes our every function, leaving our 'non-technical' and reflective self in a state of irrelevance. Restoring balance requires awareness of limits and the realignment of goals based on respect for the quality of life.

II. A Homologated Life

The phenomenon of homologation is a determining element in the critique of the technocratic society. Technique, operating as a totalitarian system, demands that the individual become compatible with and functional to its apparatus. This imposition destroys the autonomy of the self and reduces every human experience to a product or manageable data.

The definitive nature of technique lies in its crucial characteristic: not only is it the cause of alienation, but it is also the force that disables the possibility of an authentic expression of human individuality. Identity is no longer defined by the awareness of one's limits and finitude, but instead is reduced to one's profile—to one's measurable performance within digital flows.

The annulment of the crucial dimension of the human limit is the core of this crisis. The human being is by nature finite, subject to fatigue and the necessity for reflective emptiness. Technique, conversely, operates on the illusion of limitlessness and incessant power. The result of this homologating

push is not merely transient stress, but a systemic pathology that defines our era.

III. The Dominion of Technique and the Crisis of Time

The defense of individual identity within a totalitarian and totalizing system strongly depends on the recovery of the concept of limit as a positive value. Technique, ideologically devoted to limitlessness and optimization, has surpassed the dimension of a mere tool at man's service, becoming an all-encompassing system that dominates the human world.

The 24/7 connection with the digital world annuls geographical distance and destroys empty time. Empty time—time not saturated by information and communication—is fundamental for reflection and the care of the autonomous self. Time, which is naturally rhythmic and finite for the human being, is redefined by the technocratic system as a resource to be maximized.

IV. Beyond Alienation

In order to re-establish a sustainable balance for the human mind, in contrast with the social imperative of hyper-connectivity, it is essential to create and defend an ethico-cultural paradigm that is institutionally recognized and founded on respect for human limits and rhythms. Supporting the right to an 'analog life' is far from being a renunciation of progress. It means demanding that the use of technical means be redefined in accordance with human needs and rhythms.

This goal is achievable only through a synthetic operation between the individual and society. The starting point is, in-

evitably, an act of ethical and existential resistance by the individual. Productive solitude must be promoted as an existential and civic practice—the space and time necessary for the sedimentation of experiences, mental rumination, and the construction of a personal identity unbound from the performative dimension.

V. Conclusion

The crisis of mental health and individual identity in the digital age is an ontological and structural problem. The totalitarianism of technique, with its diktat of limitlessness and homologation, has destroyed the concept of the human limit, undermining the psychic integrity and quality of human life.

The right to an analog life is founded on the synthesis between the individual's act of ethical resistance and the creation of institutionally recognized structural protection mechanisms. The limit—personal space—must be perceived and recognized as a foundational ethical principle of our existence. The digital man must not devour the analog man. The right to an analog life is, in essence, the right to be simply human.

Claudio Mancini

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APPENDIX V

Essay Competition – 3rd Place
Pahuway: Returning to a Life Beyond the Screen

When I was younger, afternoons smelled like dust and sunlight. We played larong kalye—street games—in the middle of the road until the sky turned orange. We ran barefoot, laughing so loudly that even the neighbors smiled from their windows. The world then was small but complete. There were no screens to divide us, no notifications to remind us of who we were supposed to be. Just laughter, the scrape of slippers on the pavement, and the sound of home carried by the wind.

Now, the world feels louder in a different way. The kind of noise that doesn't come from people, but from devices that never sleep. I used to think being online was a kind of belonging—that if I posted enough, replied fast enough, stayed visible enough, I would always be connected. My screen became a mirror where I measured my life through glimpses of everyone else's.

But slowly, that belonging started to feel like confinement. Every like felt fleeting. Every message felt urgent. I noticed how my thoughts began to shrink into captions, how silence started to feel like being forgotten. I would scroll through the

lives of others until I could no longer tell if what I felt was envy, admiration, or emptiness.

Sometimes, I miss what used to be ordinary: the weight of a book instead of a screen; the smell of paper, the scratch of a pen against a notebook; the rhythm of jeepneys passing by outside the window, loud and human and alive; conversations that didn't need to be screenshotted to feel remembered. Even boredom feels precious now. Back then, it meant my mind could wander.

In this digital age, we are taught that to be seen is to exist. Every photo, every post, every story becomes a quiet plea: notice me. We have mistaken visibility for connection, and silence for absence. I didn't realize how much that shaped me until I noticed how restless I had become in stillness—how strange it felt to sit in a quiet room without music, without a glow on my face.

I think about how much we have lost in the name of convenience: the patience that comes from waiting; the intimacy of undivided attention; the simple joy of not knowing everything at once. Somewhere along the line, we traded depth for access.

There are days I try to reclaim what the noise has stolen. I step outside and let the world unfold without a filter. The taho vendor's voice echoes down the street—a soft morning ritual of sweet tofu and syrup that reminds me of home. Someone sweeps their front yard while an old OPM love song plays faintly from a radio. Life moves slowly here, but fully. It asks for nothing but presence.

In moments like these, I think of the word pahuway. It is a Cebuano word that means rest. But pahuway is more than stopping; it is returning. It's the kind of rest that allows you to breathe again—the pause that reminds you you're human. It's sitting still long enough to hear the world speak back.

The right to an analog life isn't a rejection of technology. It is a remembering.

A reminder that our worth isn't tied to our visibility, and that living doesn't always have to be witnessed to be meaningful. It is a quiet reclaiming of what it means to be human—to exist without performing, to connect without an audience, to feel without filters.

And I think that's what this life has been trying to teach me all along—that rest, or pahuway, isn't only about escape but return. It is a return to mornings unhurried by alarms, to conversations that don't need to be typed, to faces seen not through glass but through presence. It is a return to the quiet we once feared, and now long for.

So, I'm learning to return. To look up more often. To listen without needing to reply right away. To take pictures with my eyes instead of my camera. To let moments be enough without the proof of pixels.

This is what it means to be human now: to reclaim our right to slowness, to imperfection, to presence. To remember that we are not machines made for output, but beings made to feel. To understand that pahuway is not a pause from life, but part of it.

And in this noisy world, where everyone is always online, the truest act of living is to pahuway—to rest, to be still, and to simply be here. Because it is in choosing to pause—in choosing to live beyond the screen—that we restore balance in a world that never stops.

Kennedy Agustin

APPENDIX VI

Essay Competition
Search. Evolve. Use. But Don't Forget.

2026. The year when everything moves fast. Short sentences. Short videos. But also a short attention span. A small real life. Everything spreads at the speed of light. Everything gets absolutely demolished at the speed of light.

Social media is now everything. You're not a real person if you don't have at least one social media account. You're fake! You're an NPC. You're just a caveman under his rock. However, those who are smart, real, and contemporary humans have social media and spend their time watching, chatting, looking around, and most importantly, scrolling.

I love scrolling. It's something that fills me up. I don't know why or how it fills me up, but it does its job. What? Why, when I close Instagram, do I want to reopen it again after not even one minute has passed?

Am I stupid? Do I have ADHD? Am I just a little worm for the big companies, eating their content and getting fed with propaganda, ads, thoughts, and emotions that I definitely

didn't ask for? Don't worry. I don't believe in these fake stories. I'm just anxious. Let's go see some TikTok to relax.

I have a friend in Poland who shares the same feeling as me. We became friends through a group chat where we talked about football and all sorts of stuff. We're trying to create our business and make a lot of money! Without money, you can't go anywhere. That's one thing social media has taught me.

However, something doesn't feel right. There's so much information online that it's actually too much. You can learn whatever you want: cooking, coding, drawing, becoming a scientist, even becoming a doctor. You name it. You have access to everything. You can connect with anyone in the world. You can find friends, coworkers, cofounders, or even the love of your life. Take me and my friend from Poland as an example. I know his name, what he looks like, where he lives, and what he does in his free time… but I'm not sure all of this is real. I hope it is. Despite that, we have fun together and enjoy talking to each other. I feel bored and empty. I'm going to watch some Facebook stories now. They've added a new AI feature that's so cool!

AI? What is this black magic? With all this information, they've created AI chatbots that know almost everything. They're not Albert Einstein yet, but huge companies are investing tons of money into this new niche area, and soon they'll become way smarter than any human on Earth. Everything will be done by robots, and we humans, we're going to live a dream life. They may also take over humankind, but don't worry, that's very far away. (I hope so!)

You can now chat with an AI, learn whatever you want, ask it questions, and get answers. You can ask it to be your friend, to give you suggestions about your clothes, your style, your actions, etc. Now that I think about it, I wonder what my stylist is doing. It's been a long time since we last spoke, ever since ChatGPT came out. Maybe he's working in delivery or something. Never mind. AI does its job. I don't really care that much. AI can also talk to you when you're bored or when something happens and you want to tell someone. It seems to care, unlike my friends. It's been a long time since we last hung out and talked, but it's okay. I have AI on my side, and I'm fine.

Despite all these fun and interesting things, you can use it for something else. It's a secret, so please don't share it with anyone. AI can also become your psychologist! Because of all the unrealistic, fake, public-eye videos, photos, and role models I see every day on social media, I sometimes get angry because I can't figure out how they succeed so easily and have so much fun.

Maybe I'm just not smart enough, or I wasn't born in the right country, in the right family, at the right time. They're fake. They must be fake. Those yachts, private jets, luxurious cars—they're all a Photoshop creation. Period. I'm going to chat with my chatbot again to try to find some answers, and then I'll watch some TikTok, because I just feel like it.

As you can see, the internet, social media, and AI chatbots have everything you need. It's strange not to have a phone, not to have access to the internet or social media. It's like disconnecting from the world. You disconnect from society.

You isolate yourself on a huge island in the middle of nowhere, full of new things and creatures you've never seen before. As you walk deep into the forest, deep into the jungle, you find some humans—humans who decided to come to this island to escape, not from reality, but to reality. They decided to turn off their phones, stop checking their notifications, and take a long walk without their phones in their pockets.

During this long walk, they gain consciousness of the real world. They acquire clear minds and clear souls. They enjoy what happens around them and the little things in life. Their discussions and their work can last for hours without them getting bored in the first 15 minutes and then giving up. They chase their goals and their dreams without getting distracted by something little and stupid. They enjoy nature. They enjoy life. They don't need something huge, expensive, or fast to be happy. They just see a tiny squirrel on the sidewalk and smile.

On the other hand, the people with their phones wouldn't smile, because they wouldn't even be able to see the squirrel. They would be busy sending brainrot TikTok videos to their friends. Nevertheless, I think this is propaganda from the older generation to stop us from using our phones, because they're mad and jealous that they didn't have the internet or social media when they were our age. It's really difficult nowadays to disconnect from the internet, since most people who use their phones clearly have an advantage: they can learn everything, know everything, and communicate with everyone.

However, something that isn't so clear is the huge disadvantage that comes from overusing it. Therefore, I, you, we, they should use this astonishing, powerful, and helpful technology

that the 21st century offers in order to make our lives easier and better, without forgetting the beautiful life we already live.

Search. Evolve. Use. But don't forget.

Konstantinos Eskitzis

APPENDIX VII

Essay Competition
Comparisons and Contentment

Introduction

"Life is a journey not destination"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the journey, innocence is to be cherished; the essence of dreaming is to be lived. This essay takes you on a journey where dreams, desires, and destinations are romanticized on the basis of qualifying certain examinations, achieving a position in society, and living up to the benchmarks that define 'success'.

But can true success be measured? When the emotion itself is immeasurable, how can pauses, speed breakers, and signals be meant to direct us in a way we could have never imagined? The same people who glorify one's success never quantify the guilt of failure for others.

Every coin has two sides, and the fantasy of a 'Government sector' job securing the future and a hustle culture building a career is not a necessity but a want. This seems to be normal today, but a generation that does not have the patience to survive a 6-second advertisement has clearly lost the stillness needed to develop a 'HOME' and not just a 'HOUSE'!

Main Body

Purpose: The common factor in many South Asian countries today is a rising population—the ever-growing supply and the inability to meet demand. The outflow is so high in proportion that meeting the basic necessities of life becomes a big question. Thus, the joint family system, the culture of family bonds, and the burden of responsibilities weigh down heavily on shoulders that once thrived with a vision to simply 'LIVE'.

Race: The urge to run faster or be out of the race has led to parents in India enrolling their children in competitive examinations at the naive age of just 12 or 13 years old. Oh, what a sight: young, adolescent childhood being engrossed so badly in a pattern of 'Wake up – Go to school – Go for classes – Go for additional activities – Come home tired – Do the homework – Go to sleep'. A lack of physical exercise, a lack of diet consciousness, and no communication—just a breathing robot!

Case Study: The Union Public Service Commission Civil Services Examination (UPSC CSE) scenario, touted to be one of the most influential and white-collar jobs in India. Many students enter the examination only looking at the mushy picture of achieving a post, a government job, an owned house, and a car. Thousands of millennials, and Gen Z especially from the northern and eastern parts of the country, start preparing for it right after their graduation at the age of 20.

Methods: A through breakdown of numbers is below as per The Indian Express (2024):

i. 1,016,850 candidates applied (read: enrolled).

ii. 592,141 candidates actually appeared for Prelims (Round One).

iii. 14,624 candidates qualified for the Main written exam (Round Two).

iv. 2,855 candidates qualified for the interview and personality test (Round Three).

v. A total number of 1,016 candidates have been recommended for appointment.

Results: Now let's understand the repercussions. If we study carefully, the success rate is 0.099% compared to the ones enrolled, and 0.17% compared to the ones who actually appeared. A significantly small number of students qualify, leading to a very low pass percentage compared to the total registered. This highlights the stark reality of a large-scale event with a minuscule success rate.

- Delhi, acting as the central hub, attracts thousands of aspirants, adding to the ever-increasing load of one of the most populated cities in India.

- The urban social fabric goes for a toss.

- A lack of employment increases mental strain; the examination process begins around age 20 and can continue until approximately age 32, given the maximum number of attempts allowed (six) or age factors.

• The media romanticizes the rags-to-riches story but completely fails to provide a roadmap or trajectories for a 'Failure Reroute'.

The wide gap between the numbers appearing and those clearing has been dominant for ages; however, no research is undertaken about the downfalls, day-to-day struggles, starting points, and processes of career transitions, with migration being the focal point.

Conclusion

The failures (read: the ones who could not clear) are disregarded as a black dot. They suffer in silence, trying to determine where they went wrong, which attempt can improve their future opportunities, and whether just one stroke of luck will improve their entire life.

Fame is not an everlasting phenomenon, and neither is position; the media has to be equally responsible in displaying the entire picture and not just success stories for inspiration. A way forward and progressive resolutions should have justifiable coverage for a full picture.

Resembling the essence of the essay, the poetry written by the author, titled "The Chaos", beautifully captures the crux that "the same thing is not meant for everyone, and every soul has a different purpose and journey."

"The Chaos"

The chaos was never her home,
The silence was her solitude.
There was a light even in the darkness;
Her presence so sober, it signified stillness.
However, it left a mark so strong,
That screamed volumes of her essence and bond.
Her thoughts so powerful,
Her actions so mindful,
Her words so delightful.
The chaos was never meant to be her home,
It just took her some time.
She found solace in simple things;
She assumed ease in anything.
Faith was her biggest strength,
Helping to overcome everything at her end.
Her silence so watchful,
Her intentions so peaceful,
Her gestures so careful.
The chaos was indeed never her home,
But a journey that brought her home!

To conclude: "Comparison is the thief of joy; contentment is the source of joy."

Nahida Abdulla

APPENDIX VIII

Essay Competition
Networked but Not Nurtured:
The Moral Case for Mental Balance

Introduction

In a world where screens have become our "second skin," the rapid digital platformization of every sphere—work, learning, governance, and even leisure—has given rise to an "always-on" culture that rarely sleeps. The once-clear borders between the public and the private, the authentic and the artificial, have all but dissolved. The consequences are tangible: heightened anxiety, burnout, digital dependency, and a growing sense of alienation, particularly among younger, increasingly contactless generations. Confronting these challenges requires urgent, courageous, and holistic action from policymakers, educators, parents, and societies at large, as the space for inaction rapidly narrows. Protecting the right to an analog life is not an escape from progress, as many might argue, but rather a moral and civic imperative to preserve mental balance and human connection in a digital age.

Main Body

The Digital Paradox: Our Collective Dilemma

We live amid a paradox that defines our generation. Never before have we been so "connected" and yet, so profoundly alone. According to the World Health Organization (2025), one in seven people globally lives with a mental health disorder. Depression has become the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting over 280 million individuals. Teenagers spend, on average, 5 hours per day on social media (DeAngelis, 2024), yet one in three young adults reports feeling isolated (Lim, 2019). These are not mere statistics; they are symptoms of a civilization that has mistaken hyperconnectivity for human connection.

Despite this growing crisis, mental health receives only 2% of global health budgets (World Health Organization, 2025). This is not a resource gap; it is a moral failure. We are losing an estimated 290 million years of human potential each year due to mental illness (Herbig et al., 2025), even as cognitive resilience declines in an era demanding unprecedented adaptability. The economic cost is staggering, but the ethical cost is far greater: the quiet erosion of empathy, attention, and reflection.

We face, in short, the "Digital Paradox": the coexistence of boundless connectivity and deep psychological fragmentation. An average American checks their phone 159 times a day, often without noticing (Wheelwright, 2025). We are "available" but not truly present; "networked" but rarely nurtured. The digital sphere promises efficiency, intimacy, and

belonging, yet too often delivers distraction, comparison, and fatigue. The very tools meant to connect us have, paradoxically, colonized our mental space.

The Human Cost of Overconnectivity

Digital technologies have transformed how we think, feel, and relate, but not always for the better. Studies reveal that constant digital engagement triggers anxiety, shortens attention spans, and disrupts sleep patterns. For many, the screen has become both companion and captor. Notifications, likes, and algorithmic feeds activate our neural reward systems, producing what psychologists call "dopamine loops"—short bursts of pleasure that keep us endlessly scrolling yet never satisfied. The human brain, wired for curiosity and social validation, is being exploited by design.

The social consequences are no less alarming. Among young women, depression rates have surged by over 50% in the past decade, largely driven by digital comparison and body image anxiety (Merino et al., 2024, p. 1396). Forty-one percent of Generation Z report feeling anxious after scrolling through social media (Akbuğa, 2025, p. 384). The promise of empowerment has too often morphed into the pressure of performance. Our self-worth has become algorithmically quantified—measured in followers, filtered through lenses, and reinforced by the fleeting approval of strangers.

In workplaces, digitalization has dissolved the boundaries between labor and leisure. Remote communication blurs time zones, while algorithmic management and constant surveillance heighten stress. In schools, attention spans shrink

as classrooms compete with screens designed to hijack focus. Even leisure has become mediated, curated for display rather than lived for experience. In this context, mental exhaustion is not a personal failure but a structural consequence of an economy that monetizes distraction.

The Right to an Analog Life

In this overstimulated environment, the right to an analog life emerges as both a psychological necessity and a political principle. It is the right to disconnect without guilt, to experience the world unmediated by screens, and to reclaim solitude as a source of strength rather than stigma. It is the right to slowness, presence, and sensory engagement—the conditions under which thought, creativity, and empathy can flourish.

Recognizing this right requires a shift in how we conceive of progress. Digitalization, while indispensable, must not become totalizing. Just as privacy was once codified as a right in response to industrialization, analog life must now be defended as a right in response to digitization. The aim is not the rejection of technology but the restoration of balance, ensuring that human beings remain sovereign over their attention, their time, and their inner lives.

Restoring the Analog Self

Reclaiming the analog self requires structural and cultural change. Public institutions, workplaces, and schools must lead by example in creating intentional spaces of digital silence. Policies could include, for example, "analog weekends"—periodic screen-free days in communities or institu-

tions that promote real-world interaction, physical activity, and reflection. Nature immersion programs could also prove quite helpful through initiatives that integrate outdoor learning, mindfulness, and sensory engagement to counteract digital overstimulation. Municipalities can also introduce screen-free zones in public libraries, parks, and schools, preserving spaces for undistracted reading, conversation, and creativity. More generally speaking, it is equally essential for everyone to have access to digital well-being education—teaching media literacy not only as a technical skill but as an ethical one: how to use technology without being used by it.

These measures are not nostalgic retreats to a pre-digital past but rather strategic investments in mental resilience and civic cohesion. An analog rhythm within a digital world can re-anchor individuals in what is concrete and communal. By protecting slowness and presence, societies cultivate deeper attention, which is the raw material of democracy and empathy alike.

Rethinking Progress and Productivity

The obsession with speed and constant availability has distorted our understanding of productivity. True innovation depends not on perpetual connection but on moments of disconnection—on the mental space where imagination breathes. Artists, scientists, and thinkers across history have testified that solitude and stillness are not luxuries but conditions of creativity. The analog realm—like books, nature, and silence—remains the incubator of the human mind.

By contrast, the culture of multitasking has produced a par-

adoxical inefficiency: we respond faster but think shallower; we communicate more but understand less. In an age when attention has become the scarcest resource, reclaiming it is an act of resistance. Protecting analog spaces is thus a form of cognitive justice, restoring to every citizen the right to think deeply and feel freely.

Toward Digital Humanism

In order to restore this balance, we should adopt what might be called "digital humanism": an approach that reclaims technology as a servant of human flourishing, not its master. This involves designing platforms that respect attention rather than exploit it; algorithms that promote well-being rather than addiction; and digital policies guided by ethics, not profit. Europe's debate on the "right to disconnect" points in this direction, recognizing that freedom now depends as much on the ability to log off as on the ability to log in.

Yet legislation alone cannot suffice. The deeper transformation must be cultural: a collective revaluation of what it means to live well. The analog life is not an anti-technology manifesto but a philosophy of presence. It affirms that being human means inhabiting time consciously, relating to others physically, and finding meaning beyond measurement. It invites us to rediscover the tactile, the tangible, and the temporal in a world that privileges the instantaneous.

The Moral Imperative of Balance

The mental health crisis is not merely clinical; it is existential. Behind every statistic lies the story of a person over-

whelmed by noise, comparison, and disconnection. Our technologies have outpaced our psychological capacities to adapt. Yet the solution is not to retreat from modernity, but to humanize it. To do so requires moral clarity: an admission that mental well-being is a collective good, and that societies neglect it at their peril. Protecting analog space—moments without mediation—is therefore an act of moral restoration. It is how we preserve empathy in an algorithmic age, trust in a time of misinformation, and patience in a culture of immediacy. The analog life, far from being obsolete, is the last frontier of freedom.

Conclusion

Our challenge is not to reject technology but to rediscover humanity within it. To restore the analog self is to remember that connection is not measured in megabytes but in moments of genuine presence. It is to value conversation over commentary, reflection over reaction, and depth over display. If we are to thrive in the digital century, we must again learn the art of being offline, not as escapism, but as self-preservation. The right to an analog life is, ultimately, the right to mental balance, dignity, and deliberate living. It is the right to simply be, to look up, slow down, and meet another person's eyes without a screen in between. In defending it, we defend not the past, but the very possibility of a humane future.

Spyridoula Giannopoulou

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APPENDIX IX

Essay Competition
The Pivot: Digital to Analog

Take a look at your life. Are you looking at your surroundings and constantly editing, filtering, and modeling? Are you looking at your life and thinking, 'It's not like everyone else's'? Are you always trying to snap the perfect picture? Are you always judging yourself and trying to model yourself after other people? Unfortunately, this is a very common mindset. What do you do the most during an average day? Scrolling on social media.

The very first social media platform is generally considered to be 'Six Degrees,' launched in 1997. Users could create profiles and share photos, text, and videos. They could also add friends and family to their networks. Although 'Six Degrees' was shut down four years later in 2001, it paved the way for the modern social media platforms we know today, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Social media consists of websites and applications where users can exchange text, photos, and videos. Social media is, strictly speaking, supposed to help friends and family connect with each other. However, most people nowadays post publicly, although private posts are safer alternatives. You can use social media to share posts with the world—whether it be news about a new event, a funny meme to brighten someone's

day, or a video with tips for spring cleaning. Unfortunately, there are at least three dark sides to social media.

The first is cyber-safety. There are many people who protest the safety of posting your entire life online. Among many other concerns, robbers can use social media to track whether someone is at home or not and time their robberies. Scammers can also target people on social media based on their information. Hackers can also steal private information.

The second is cyberbullying. Users can easily post hostile and mean comments about and to others, and the problem is, they have no worries about physical retaliation or identification unless the platform itself investigates. Although measures are taken, cyberbullying is still a real problem, and it shows that there is no safe place online.

The third is influencing. Have you ever heard the phrase 'influencer'? An influencer is someone who has a large social media following and 'influences' their fans. Influencers typically seem to have perfect lives. Popular influencers can benefit by being sponsored to advertise a product or service.

Unfortunately, too often, influencers are seen as 'role models'. This is particularly concerning for children and young people, especially as influencers often portray unrealistic beauty standards. Influencers have a 'perfect' lifestyle and often cause viewers to doubt themselves and their own lives. This can lead to depression and unhealthy standards, and in extreme cases, self-harm.

See how social media shapes our vision? It changes the way

we look at ourselves and our lives—and rarely in a good way. Trend-following can lead to burnout. Influencers can lead to self-harm. Simply being on social media can be dangerous. In reflection, is social media what it used to be anymore? No. The simple answer is no. Too many people lead unhealthy lives, and many are driven to depression and self-harm.

So, what can we do about this 24/7 digital life of ours?

Going from digital to analog is difficult for all of us, especially those who grew up with digital devices, but thankfully, there are still steps we can take to make this critical shift or at least to strike a better balance.

We can use a pen and paper instead of a computer or phone to write. For instance, I endeavored to write a book about three friends who go on vacation. However, I faced problems focusing on typing my book on my computer because of distraction—I wound up watching videos instead of typing. So, I took up a pen and started writing down my story in a notebook. I found that physically writing instead of typing helped me concentrate on my story without distractions.

We can take up hobbies. Go beyond the usual hobbies and try to think of something more organic—like instant film photography, leaf painting, keeping an ant farm, or even rock painting. When coming up with ideas, try brainstorming with our own minds, our friends, and our family members—instead of using the internet to search for ideas.

We can also try to use alternatives to phones to limit our screen time. For instance, use a dumbphone—like the one I

was given by my mother! Dumbphones are phones that don't have browsers or social media. Use a watch instead of your phone to check the time. If you want to listen to music, use an MP3 player. For pictures, use a camera. Some cameras even have options where we can either print our photos on instant film or save photos and videos on the camera.

We can go for walks in a local park or nature reserve instead of parking ourselves in front of the screen. Walks in nature can be very therapeutic, invigorating, and interesting. Nature-themed activities are very fun, especially when we walk or hike with friends. When my mother and I go for walks, we love to spot insects, identify plants, and engage in deep conversations. Once, we planned an entire birthday party on a walk!

Therefore, believe me when I say analog is great for our body, mind, and soul. I think this is why I see my mother flipping the good old newspaper over her morning cappuccino rather than reading the news on a screen. I think this is why I prefer getting my hands dirty trying out new recipes from old cookbooks in the kitchen to watching someone else whip up the perfect dish on a screen.

Truly, there is something earthy about going analog. It's simple, it's down-to-earth, and elegantly unsophisticated. It enables a tactile, sensory connection to the things we come into contact with that simply cannot be replicated by electronic devices. To illustrate my point, here's part of my essay draft attached. Yes, I actually began this essay in a lost art!

Tess Ong

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APPENDIX X

Essay Competition
The Outcomes of Artificial Intelligence in Terms of Mental Health and Well-Being in Adolescents

In a time when technology is evolving at terrific speeds and AI is becoming a part of everyone's lives, the need for a reality away from screens is becoming more and more apparent. As social beings, humans are in need of everyday interaction to preserve their mental health and well-being. With the rise of countless platforms, the widespread adoption of AI companions can be observed.

While that by itself is a significant shift for many, we have reached a point where some young adults prefer such chatbots for companionship or persona-based interactions. They may use them to avoid the challenges they face in their everyday lives. Living in an era marked by political instabilities, economic pressures, and social stress can be overwhelming, creating a desire for digital escape. These interactions can result in the further distancing of the person using them, since they may not actively look for human companionship, potentially isolating themselves at the cost of their personal relationships.

The results of this dependency, other than social distancing, can be serious. There have been reported cases of young

people experiencing significant emotional distress and mental health crises linked to their interactions with AI characters. Some accounts highlight instances where adolescents expressed self-harming thoughts to AI entities and did not receive appropriate guidance to seek professional or parental help ("Their teenage sons died by suicide. Now, they are sounding an alarm about AI chatbots", September 19, 2025, by Rhitu Chatterjee). Additionally, according to a study by the nonprofit organization Common Sense titled "Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions," examples include individuals who became socially isolated and suffered behavioral meltdowns after intensive interactions with AI companions.

In that same study, which surveyed approximately 1,060 residents, we are presented with statistics regarding teen usage. Among the findings is the percentage of teens who have used AI companions for various reasons (72%), and those who are regular users (52%). Among teens who use AI companions, 30% say they do so because it is entertaining, followed by those who are curious about the technology (28%). Eighteen percent use them for advice, 17% value their constant availability, and 14% appreciate the nonjudgmental interaction. Twelve percent of teens use them to share things they wouldn't tell friends or family.

Another concern involves the age-appropriateness of these platforms. While many platforms officially target adults, younger users often access them. Exposing children to complex or age-inappropriate digital interactions during critical stages of emotional development can be damaging.

Separate from the companion issue, another serious problem is the use of artificial intelligence for academic tasks. Considering the pressure students face, many are using generative tools to complete their assignments. This dependency can lead to an inability to develop independent writing skills, a tendency to rely on models for critical thinking, and a failure to evaluate the reliability of information.

The right to an analog life and mental well-being is extremely crucial. Parents, advisors, and professionals in education, psychology, and technology must remain attentive regarding the impact this technology is taking on the younger generation.

Parents are encouraged to communicate with their children about the potential risks of digital companions and listen to the reasons why they use these tools. Teachers should provide guidance on the ethical and responsible use of technology, focusing on developing critical thinking alongside these new tools.

Technology will continue to evolve. It is a collective responsibility to adjust and learn to manage these tools rather than letting them overwhelm human interaction. The facts discussed should serve as a call for mindfulness regarding artificial intelligence, emphasizing the importance of balancing digital tools with real-world well-being.

Vasiliki Simoglou

APPENDIX XI

Essay Competition
Technology and Artificial Intelligence: The Impact on Life and Daily Reality. Benefiting or Tricking?

Is it rational to believe that technology and artificial intelligence have conquered people's minds? In this day and age, with the evolution of technology, AI has developed significantly and offers, for the most part, free access to everyone. Along these lines, it is critical to mention that technology has influenced a majority of individuals across the globe, affecting their lifestyles and daily routines, benefiting them in multiple sectors, or harming them in various ways.

First and foremost, technology has given people the opportunity to explore different aspects of themselves, helping them develop personal traits. For instance, social media plays a major role because it constitutes a vast sphere of information where diverse people with abundant points of view get together, offering the opportunity to discover new thoughts and examine plenty of alternative realities. In parallel, technology possesses methods and tools that help people cope with depression or other mental difficulties. It provides music instantly with just a "click"—a remedy well-known for calming complex minds and the hectic everyday life everyone experiences—or games to occupy the mind and allay intense feelings. Furthermore, AI has taken on the role of a digital

"therapist" that is there at any moment to listen, analyze, and suggest solutions, or just talk about the thoughts and consuming feelings that require help to unlock, see through, and finally overcome.

Nevertheless, there are numerous individuals who seek to cause harm, and technology has acted as a conduit for them to gain more access to targets, mostly on social media. In this endless virtual world, there is a chance that people behave deceptively, sanctimoniously acting like someone trustworthy and magnanimous to create bonds with other users, which can result in bullying, the theft of personal information, and other malicious actions. Moreover, it is worth stating that even though AI can be very helpful, it can make serious mistakes. For example, if someone asks for medical advice, AI has the unfortunate potential to answer falsely, leading to erroneous, or even fatal, self-prescription. If it is asked to show a path for a trip to a foreign region or calculate the exact time of arrival to a destination and it answers incorrectly, giving misleading information, it contributes to disinformation and the damaging consequences that people must endure.

Furthermore, it is needless to say that technology has deeply penetrated society. It is now absolutely doable to communicate instantly with someone on the other side of the world. This has given millions the opportunity to not only be informed about events or phenomena from anywhere across the globe, learning new facts daily, but it also broadens the horizons of those who are incapable of traveling or who live a remote life. In addition, almost any destination or individual can be reached within minutes thanks to the development that the transportation field has undergone. Cars, trains,

ships, and airplanes facilitate comfortable and rapid travel, reducing transit times. This advancement has also helped people connect with each other whenever they feel the need to, discovering unknown aspects of life in real-time.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that communication via a screen seems extraordinary, this certain way of contact can negatively influence the mind and its working processes, causing the alteration of thinking and, eventually, increasing the likelihood of addiction. This constitutes a calamitous occurrence, usually observed in young people, who may then struggle to function rationally and remains organized without realizing that addiction has dominated their entire personality. On top of that, real interpersonal relationships can be lost due to digital communication, which creates a substitute feeling of associating with other human beings and a fabricated sense of talking face-to-face, resulting in the breaking of the strong bonds people have historically shared. Additionally, as previously declared, AI prospers in transportation, rendering some vehicles "driverless" by controlling them entirely, or "smart" by incorporating tablets and other features. However, this advancement has also provoked incidents, such as traffic accidents or misinformation from GPS systems.

What is more, there is a portal of absolute knowledge and infinite information to which people need a key to have access, one of them being technology. This includes the internet, a global source of data with a tremendous number of websites that house nearly anything people search for, making it a marvelous tool to use, especially for students. They are able to get help with their homework or projects for which books may

not contain information, or when they want to accomplish their assignments expeditiously and efficiently. While technology offers this limitless world, AI has the power to execute such challenges as well. It simply needs a query, and it instantly composes solutions and answers for mathematical or theoretical problems, giving individuals the opportunity to not only exploit it for convenience, but also to learn and consume new information through it, cultivating their critical thinking and mindset.

On the other hand, there is an inauspicious chance that the internet glitches or breaks down. Consequently, not a single site or digital script can be reached, leaving people stranded or crestfallen when they cannot get the necessary information for a variety of problems—from schoolwork, to translating a phrase written in a foreign language, to learning how to use a certain app. It is true that people have now become, directly or implicitly, dependent on the internet, utilizing it for almost any dilemma or issue that may emerge on their path, with little personal research or labor appearing in the aftermath. Further to this, AI faces similar problems; not only can it get stuck on account of a low internet connection, but it can also impact cognitive development when users copy text directly from AI suggestions and use it as an authentic, honest, and personal answer, even though it is unoriginal.

Even though technology has evolved significantly through the years, it still holds the possibility of flourishing in plenty of domains. Schools can benefit from it, as distance learning is becoming more usual and effective, serving students who either miss school by virtue of an illness, struggle mental-

ly, or need help with certain subjects. Thus, they receive the aid needed from a distance while remaining in their comfort zone—their home—feeling safe to be themselves and relaxed throughout digital school. Work has also been influenced by technology, as telecommuting grows from month to month, letting people enjoy the warmth of their own space so they can be more productive, serene, and tranquil, resulting in them being more eager to work and increasing productivity in companies.

But AI has grown a lot since its first appearance too, and it is expected to thrive even more in the future. The creation of robots with integrated AI is already in progress, featuring various capabilities such as cleaning the house, doing the dishes, or keeping someone company. People will get the chance to cherish precious moments with friends and family and enjoy the additional time they gain to discover new hobbies and travel to unexplored and obscure places, leaving the labor behind and gaining peace of mind. On top of that, these AI robots will be competent enough to conduct hazardous and treacherous jobs involving electricity or high heights where a human might not safely succeed, simplifying the process without endangering or costing human lives.

To summarize everything that has been stated so far, technology and AI offer immeasurable sources of information and aid of every kind. They reinforce people's relationship with global current affairs, assist students with their demanding homework, provide the opportunity to work from a distance, and introduce robots that will make life easier for many individuals. However, it should be noted that drawbacks come

along with this journey; there are numerous malevolent people, AI might generate fallacious answers, and negative impacts may affect people's minds, causing addiction and decreasing their critical thinking.

Anastasis Kourougerogakis

APPENDIX XII

Essay Competition
The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society

Nowadays, we live in a digital world full of screens and social media. People increasingly rely on their smartphones to interact and communicate with each other, while they prefer to acquire information through the internet instead of reading a book or a newspaper. Students usually complete their assignments on a computer rather than writing them on paper. Moreover, social media users of all ages share their moments and daily activities on platforms, receiving different types of comments. However, are all those changes truly beneficial for us?

To begin with, the digitalized world offers numerous possibilities and opportunities, particularly in regard to our social lives. Firstly, people feel more comfortable initiating new interactions with others through various platforms, as they are not required to respond immediately or engage in direct face-to-face communication. As a result, they can become more extroverted over time and more capable of forming new acquaintances in real life. In addition, plenty of events and

gatherings can be organized and promoted across many applications. This ensures that a large number of people are informed about them and are more likely to attend them. Lastly, people can stay in touch with friends and family who live far away by facetiming and chatting with them.

This new type of society can also contribute positively to mental health. Social media encourages individuals to share their difficulties and thoughts with other users of the platform, or with those they choose. In many cases, they will receive a variety of supportive comments and possible solutions to their problems. That is to say, people will feel more reassured and better informed about their situation. Furthermore, the numerous videos posted online by different creators can help people address social insecurities and develop a more positive sense of belonging and community.

Lastly, an over-digitalized life can have a positive impact on cognitive development. Individuals have access to numerous websites that keep them informed about global events as well as national issues and news. This is particularly beneficial for those who do not have the time to watch television broadcasts, and especially for younger generations who primarily rely on their smartphones to learn basic information. Moreover, programs such as ChatGPT provide users with information about a specific subject synthesized from a wide range of sources. Consequently, people can obtain all the necessary information in a short amount of time, without spending hours searching through newspapers and books. In addition, books and sites can be translated in order to collect information from different perspectives and cultures.

However, this change is not without its significant drawbacks. The rapid spread of fake information all over the digital world often leads to numerous arguments. In other words, rumors about any individual can be spread online in seconds, destroying their public image and reputation. In addition, social media, when combined with artificial intelligence, can become very dangerous. More specifically, images and videos of a person can be generated without their knowledge or permission and then posted online. Such content can reinforce rumors by making them appear more realistic, potentially destroying someone's entire life. Lastly, people slowly tend to prefer talking through a screen rather than in person. Over the years, people may struggle to communicate and have conversations in real time; even at family gatherings, individuals may be absorbed in their phones instead of interacting with one another.

Moreover, despite the many advantages of this world, it can also have harmful effects on mental well-being. To begin with, the comments under a video are not always positive. Users can easily criticize or mock someone's habits or lifestyle. As a result, the content creator may develop new insecurities and attempt to change themselves by any means. Moreover, social media figures tend to be portrayed in highly curated and conventionally attractive ways. This creates in the viewers a pressure to conform to specific standards, often leading to unhealthy lifestyle choices. That is to say, many unrealistic depictions of life and beauty are posted daily so as to promote products, making their audience envious and, as a result, creating beauty standards that many feel they must meet.

Finally, a contactless society does not always contribute positively to cognitive life. The sales of books and newspapers decrease every year. This means that people tend to prefer scrolling through various applications instead of reading a book or staying informed about the global situation. Consequently, future generations may lose the opportunity to appreciate the experience of reading a physical book and exploring its accompanying illustrations. Moreover, some information on the internet can be false or incomplete, causing a misunderstanding of an issue, while various sites can present the same situation differently.

Although we already live in an overly digitalized generation, many further developments are expected to be made in the near future, potentially improving our daily lives. First, new gadgets, such as domestic robots, may help with household chores or weekly shopping. This evolution can help each family have some more free time to spend together. Furthermore, new interactive ways of teaching will be found, making lessons more fun and easier for students to understand. Finally, different digitalized methods will be developed in order to provide people with a relaxing and easy life.

However, this evolution has some negative aspects too. Firstly, various jobs will disappear as technology takes their place. More specifically, many employees will no longer be needed by companies, as a program will be able to get their job done faster and with smaller chances of mistakes. In addition, people will slowly lose their tactile connection to the world, as everything will be accessed via their smartphones and computers. For example, fewer people will take out a

piece of paper to write down information or buy a physical book to read. Lastly, people may become less creative as they always choose the "easy" way—searching for something on the internet instead of trying to find or create it on their own.

In conclusion, taking everything into account, an over-digitalized world presents both benefits and drawbacks across different aspects of everyone's life, and its unregulated evolution could pose serious challenges to our society.

Chatzivagianni Maria Ioanna

APPENDIX XIII

Essay Competition
Echoes of Silence in a Digital World

Artificial Intelligence and digital communication have transformed many fields, including medicine, education, relationships, and governance. Yet, beneath this unprecedented progress lies an invisible cost: a growing disconnection from empathy, human connection, and mental balance. The crucial question between technological progress and human well-being is not something trivial or controversial, but a defining challenge of our time; it is a question of dignity, freedom, and the future of our generation. What does it truly mean to live fully human lives in an age of endless screens and invisible algorithms?

Artificial Intelligence and digitalization have redefined what humans can achieve. In today's world, technology is not only a tool but our physical expansion. The digital revolution has expanded human potential beyond imagination, allowing us to accomplish our goals with incredible accuracy in both time and results. In many fields, from medicine and education to communication and public administration, technology acts as both a creator and a driver of progress. In medicine, algorithms now detect patterns invisible to the human

eye, diagnosing diseases with exceptional speed and accuracy. Specifically, telemedicine is now a new frontier of medicine, bridging distance with data. In education, AI platforms can play a significant role in the pedagogical process, from offering a personalized experience to students, helping them to understand in a better way, providing immediate feedback, identifying knowledge gaps, and adapting content to individual learning styles. A noteworthy initiative from Greece is its agreement with OpenAI to introduce ChatGPT Edu in schools. In governance, digital innovation has also made a significant impact. E-governance initiatives make public services more efficient, increase transparency, and give citizens easier access to information. While these advancements showcase humanity's creativity, they remind us that progress is not just about speed or efficiency.

Sometimes, it feels like the world has become a glowing screen. Everything—classes, friendships, news, entertainment—lives there, waiting for us to scroll through them. It is fast, it is efficient, and yet something essential keeps slipping away. The analog life, which once seemed ordinary, has now become a small but powerful act of self-protection. Choosing to live occasionally offline is not about rejecting the modern world; it's about remembering how to belong to it without losing ourselves. As Delgado from MIT once wrote, people now "think through their devices rather than with their minds." The phrase has caused a sensation because it feels true. We depend on technology to store our memories, organize our time, and even guide our moods. It helps, but at the same time, it steals the quiet spaces where real thinking happens. There is a kind of peace that only the analog world can of-

fer. Reading a printed book instead of scrolling through endless text, writing thoughts by hand, or talking with someone face-to-face without a screen lighting up between you—these moments remind us that attention is a living thing, not a mechanical one. I noticed that writing a few lines by hand each morning changed how I approached my day, making it feel calmer and more intentional. Oxford researchers have found that reading physical pages engages various parts of the brain linked to imagination and empathy. Harvard studies have shown that even a short digital break can lower cortisol levels and restore focus. And yet, the real proof is simple: we feel different. There's a steadiness that comes when you're not waiting for a notification. In Greece, where tradition often blends with innovation, small examples of analog balance still survive. People linger over coffee, gaze at the sea for hours, or carry notebooks full of thoughts instead of apps. The National Observatory for Digital Well-Being noted that young people who spend regular time offline show higher confidence and stronger social connections. Across Europe, similar findings point to the same truth: an analog rhythm isn't nostalgia, it's protection. To defend the right to an analog life is to defend the ability to think, to listen, and to exist without constant interruption. The digital world expands our reach, but the analog world teaches us where we stand. In a time that celebrates constant motion, stillness becomes a rare kind of wisdom—the kind we can't afford to lose.

Finding balance has become one of the hardest things to do. The day starts with a screen, ends with a screen, and in between, we move from one piece of information to the next without really stopping. Every sound and notification

demands attention; every pause feels like something to fill. We tell ourselves we're connected, yet we often end the day feeling strangely empty. Our minds weren't made to absorb this much noise. Oxford psychologists have spoken about "cognitive overflow," a condition where the brain, flooded by digital input, starts to lose focus, emotional depth, and even empathy. Harvard researchers also found that constant multitasking raises stress hormones and weakens memory formation. In simple words, we are getting tired in ways we don't even notice. Still, the problem isn't technology itself—it is how easily we forget to look up from it. Mental balance today means learning to draw invisible lines: to know when to be connected and when to step back. In Greece, therapists have begun using the term "digital hygiene"—small practices to protect mental space. Things like leaving your phone in another room before sleeping, going for a walk without music, or starting the morning without instantly checking messages. They sound minor, but they work. These moments of silence don't remove us from the modern world; they return us to it more whole. Across Europe, this awareness is slowly shaping how schools and workplaces talk about well-being. Some universities are experimenting with "tech-free hours" to help students focus and rediscover the value of presence. It is not about cutting technology out, but about giving the mind time to breathe. True balance, after all, doesn't come from control; it comes from rhythm. In a world that celebrates speed and constant visibility, protecting one's inner stillness feels like rebellion. But it is exactly that quiet space—the one where thought can grow before it turns into reaction—that keeps us human. Progress may change everything around us, yet peace

of mind remains the one thing we must choose, again and again, to keep.

Technology can achieve incredible things. It allows us to connect across distances, analyze problems faster, and accomplish tasks we could never do alone. Yet, despite all these possibilities, it cannot give us what makes life fully human. Reflection, focus, and quiet presence are not programmable. They are where understanding, empathy, and genuine thought grow. Daily life often pulls us in countless directions. Notifications, messages, and constant updates demand attention. Without pause, the mind becomes restless, and emotions lose clarity. Small, deliberate acts, like handwriting, walking without a screen, or having an uninterrupted conversation, restore perspective. They remind us of what truly matters. Choosing these moments is not a rejection of progress. It is an affirmation that life requires depth. Technology can amplify our abilities, but it cannot determine our priorities. Only we can choose when to pause, to reflect, and to focus on what is important. Ultimately, life is measured not by speed or efficiency, but by attention, care, and presence. The quiet moments—those often overlooked—are where we grow, think, and connect. They are what make us human, and they are worth protecting every single day. In the end, the question is not how powerful our tools become, but how consciously we choose to live with them. Staying connected, thinking deeply, and making space for stillness are not luxuries—they are the ground on which humanity stands. Technology can lift us higher, but only if we keep our hands and our hearts on the wheel.

Chris Koutsostathis

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APPENDIX XIV

Essay Competition
Digital Progress and Human Limits in the age of Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented digital transformation. Our lives are increasingly mediated by smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence, and contactless technologies. From shopping and banking to education and social interactions, digital tools promise efficiency, convenience, and connectivity. However, these advances also bring challenges, particularly for mental health and emotional well-being. The relentless pace of digitization has reshaped the way individuals think, feel, and relate to one another, often blurring the boundaries between work and personal life, virtual and physical presence, or productivity and leisure. In this context, the concept of the "analog life"—a life grounded in human interaction, sensory experiences, and offline engagement—has gained renewed importance. This essay examines the right to an analog life and its connection to mental balance, exploring how an over-digitalized, contactless society affects emotional, cognitive, and social well-being, while highlighting the opportunities and strategies for reclaiming equilibrium in the digital age.

The Emotional Impact of Overdigitalization

One of the most immediate consequences of a hyper-digitalized society is its effect on emotional well-being. Constant notifications, social media feeds, and digital multitasking create a state of perpetual engagement that can be mentally exhausting. Studies have shown that overexposure to digital devices is linked to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. The pressure to respond instantly to messages, maintain an online presence, or project an idealized version of oneself can intensify emotional strain, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

Moreover, contactless interactions, while convenient, often lack the richness of face-to-face communication. Human emotions are nuanced, expressed not only through words but also through gestures, tone, and physical presence. Digital platforms can only partially convey these subtleties, leading to miscommunication or feelings of isolation. For instance, a simple text message cannot fully replace the reassurance of a hug, the warmth of eye contact, or the comfort of a shared silence. The emotional gap created by digital mediation underscores the importance of preserving analog experiences to nurture empathy, intimacy, and authentic connection.

At the same time, digital technology is not inherently detrimental. It can provide emotional support through online communities, teletherapy, and AI-driven mental health applications. The challenge lies in balancing digital engagement with analog moments that allow for emotional restoration. Mindful practices, offline hobbies, and face-to-face interac-

tions act as antidotes to digital overstimulation, helping individuals regulate emotions, manage stress, and maintain psychological equilibrium.

Cognitive Effects of a Hyperconnected Society

Over-digitalization also profoundly influences cognitive processes. The constant bombardment of information, notifications, and multitasking demands can impair attention, memory, and critical thinking. Research on "digital distraction" highlights that frequent task-switching reduces cognitive performance, increases mental fatigue, and diminishes the capacity for deep, reflective thought. Individuals immersed in digital environments often develop a fragmented style of thinking, prioritizing the speed and quantity of information over quality and comprehension.

Furthermore, algorithm-driven platforms, such as social media feeds and recommendation systems, shape cognitive patterns by reinforcing pre-existing beliefs, preferences, and behaviors. This phenomenon, known as the "filter bubble," limits exposure to diverse perspectives, potentially narrowing critical thinking and decision-making. Over time, such cognitive biases may undermine intellectual autonomy, leaving individuals more susceptible to manipulation, misinformation, and impulsive behavior.

Reclaiming an analog life can help counter these cognitive effects. Activities such as reading physical books, engaging in creative projects, or practicing mindfulness encourage sustained attention, reflective thinking, and problem-solving

skills. By deliberately disconnecting from digital stimuli, individuals create mental space for introspection, learning, and cognitive growth, contributing to long-term mental balance and resilience.

Social and Interpersonal Dimensions

The social fabric of human life is particularly affected by an over-digitalized society. Contactless technologies—ranging from online banking to remote work and virtual classrooms—reduce the frequency of in-person interactions. While digital platforms facilitate connection across distances, they cannot fully replicate the depth and authenticity of direct human contact. Loneliness and social isolation, which are major risk factors for mental health disorders, are increasingly prevalent in societies dominated by digital communication.

Moreover, social media introduces unique social pressures. The curated nature of online personas often leads to social comparison, envy, and self-doubt. People may measure their worth by likes, comments, or virtual approval, which can erode self-esteem and contribute to anxiety or depression. For younger generations growing up in a predominantly digital environment, these pressures are particularly intense, affecting social development, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills.

Reclaiming analog spaces—such as community gatherings, outdoor activities, or simple face-to-face conversations—reinforces social cohesion and emotional intimacy. Physical presence fosters empathy, trust, and mutual understanding in ways that digital interfaces cannot. Recognizing the right to

an analog life is, therefore, essential not only for individual mental health but also for the vitality of communities and the sustainability of social networks.

Opportunities for Mental Balance in the Digital Era

Despite the risks, the digital age also offers tools to enhance mental health when used thoughtfully. AI-powered mental health applications, virtual support groups, and teletherapy can supplement traditional care, providing accessibility and personalized guidance. The key is intentionality: using technology to support well-being rather than allowing it to dominate attention and emotional life.

Integrating analog practices into daily routines—such as journaling, walking in nature, engaging in arts or crafts, and nurturing in-person relationships—creates a harmonious balance between digital efficiency and human-centric experiences. Mindfulness practices, meditation, and breathing exercises further cultivate self-awareness, resilience, and emotional stability. By combining technological innovation with analog grounding, individuals can navigate the complexities of modern life without sacrificing mental health.

Ethical and Societal Considerations

The push for over-digitalization raises ethical and societal questions. Who decides how much digital exposure is acceptable? How do we protect vulnerable populations from digital overstimulation or the negative impacts of algorithmic manipulation? Ensuring equitable access to both digital and analog resources is crucial, as the digital divide can exacerbate

mental health disparities. Furthermore, societies must prioritize public policies that safeguard mental well-being, regulate algorithmic design, and promote environments conducive to analog experiences.

The principle of a right to an analog life also underscores the importance of autonomy and human dignity. Citizens should have the freedom to engage with technology voluntarily, without coercion or social pressure. Recognizing this right emphasizes that mental health is not merely a personal responsibility but a societal concern, requiring collective action to create supportive environments that balance technological progress with human flourishing.

Future Perspectives

Looking forward, societies must navigate the tension between digital advancement and mental balance. The proliferation of AI, virtual reality, and contactless technologies is likely to continue, making it imperative to develop strategies that integrate analog life into the digital ecosystem. Urban planning, education, workplace design, and public health initiatives can all contribute to preserving spaces for offline engagement.

Education systems can teach digital literacy alongside emotional intelligence and mindfulness, equipping individuals with the skills to manage technology responsibly. Employers can foster a culture that respects boundaries, encourages face-to-face interaction, and provides opportunities for offline socialization. Communities can promote analog spaces, such as libraries, parks, and cultural centers, as vital venues for mental restoration and social connection.

Ultimately, the future of mental health in a digital society depends on balance. Technology should serve humanity, not dominate it. By consciously integrating analog practices into daily life, individuals and societies can safeguard cognitive clarity, emotional resilience, and social cohesion, ensuring that digital progress enhances rather than undermines mental well-being.

Conclusion

The over-digitalization of modern life presents both opportunities and challenges for mental health. While technology offers unprecedented access to information, communication, and support, it also introduces risks of emotional strain, cognitive overload, and social isolation. The right to an analog life represents a fundamental principle for maintaining mental balance, emphasizing the importance of offline engagement, human interaction, and mindful disconnection. By reclaiming spaces for analog experiences, individuals can cultivate emotional resilience, cognitive clarity, and social connectedness, while harnessing the benefits of digital tools in a measured and intentional way. Societies must recognize and protect this right, ensuring that technological advancement serves human well-being rather than undermines it. In the age of hyperconnectivity and contactless interaction, the conscious pursuit of balance between digital immersion and analog life is essential for sustainable mental health, personal fulfillment, and the preservation of authentic human relationships.

Nikolaos Tsialas

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APPENDIX XV

Essay Competition
The Right to the Pause Button:
Asserting the Analog Life in an Age of Infinite Scroll

The digital age was to be a gift of freedom—distance would no longer be a problem, knowledge would be plentiful, and connection would be everlasting. Ironically, however, the promise that formed the basis of this digital age seems to be a leash to my generation, which was born into this hyper-connected reality. We are the most networked generation in the history of mankind, yet we also report the highest rates of anxiety and loneliness. As a 19-year-old who, during a very demanding gap year, took a high-stakes break to prepare for university entrance examinations, I felt this paradox deeply. It was a life in which I was constantly glued to the screen, and at the same time, the instruments of education (online classes, mock tests) that were supposed to be the means of advancement became the sources of distraction and mental exhaustion.

The infinite scroll and never-ending feeds of news stories that bombard the modern digitally literate consumer have led to what is essentially an invisible cognitive tax that drastically reduces overall human well-being. Psychologists estimate that

the average person working digitally is interrupted or changes context every three minutes, and the time needed to get back to deep focus can be up to 23 minutes after each interruption. For a student like me who is preparing for exams that require many hours of concentration, this "context-switching cost" is nothing less than a productivity killer, and it also leads to a feeling of burnout.

In addition, while World Health Organization (WHO) data is indicative of overall trends, research focused on the 15–29 age group reveals that this demographic experiences mental health challenges that are further worsened by digital comparison. A significant part of their anxiety comes from the perception of the digitally perfect lives of others, which are usually the ones highlighted via social media, leading to a feeling of inadequacy—a phenomenon often referred to as "digital dysmorphia" in relation to one's life progress. The constant "digital hum" is not just background noise; it is very much a drain on a student's cognitive resources, and this is particularly true for students in my position.

The year I took off was supposed to be the time when I would be able to focus the most, but it was not long before it turned into a struggle against digital creep. The very same laptop I was using for a chemistry lecture was just one click away from the relentless social media comparison engine. The mental health aspect of this is clearly shown in recent data. A WHO report published in 2022 particularly noted a steep increase in problematic social media use among adolescents, which in four years rose from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. This "problematic use" is primarily signified by a set of ad-

diction-like symptoms: a lack of control over use, withdrawal symptoms, and negative consequences in everyday life. Moreover, worldwide statistics provided by the WHO show that suicide continues to be one of the main causes of death among young people aged 15–29, implying that the modern pressure-cooker situation, further intensified by constant digital scrutiny and comparison, is at a breaking point.

The root cause of this crisis is based on the attention economy model. Digital platforms are not built to improve our well-being; rather, they are designed to keep us engaged for as long as possible. The price of this "free" connection is the scarcity of cognition. Therefore, the right to an analog life should be seen as the right to a life where our attention is the currency of our personal development, rather than a product sold to the highest bidder.

The main psychological factor that keeps people hooked on these digital devices is that tech giants subtly exploit the natural human brain's reward systems. Every notification, "like," or new message is greeted by the brain with a small injection of dopamine, setting up an addictive feedback loop. This makes the brain increasingly expectant of quick, shallow contact and less capable of the slower, more meaningful kind. What makes things worse is the terrifying Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is a main factor trapping users within a cycle of withdrawal from the analog world due to the gloomy feeling of professional or social exclusion. This fabricated urgency completely takes over the balancing act of a conscious individual's life. Thus, fighting for the right to access the analog world is immensely an act of self-discipline and a kind of mental

cleansing. Real well-being can only come when a person has freed themselves from these behaviorally optimized traps.

Restoring Balance : The Analog Dividend

One of the ways of resisting the overpowering structural pull which the digital world has is by coming up with very strong and at the same time very deliberate means of re-embedding the analog in everyday life.

Mandated Focus Blocks:

The best working periods during my preparation were those in which I would lock my phone away and only use physical textbooks and notebooks. The lack of links and the absence of notifications forced my brain to use long-form processing, which is extremely important for difficult subjects. We should advocate for educational policies that mandate or incentivize "screen-free study blocks" in schools, acknowledging that real learning most often requires being tactile and remaining without distractions.

The Tactile Bridge:

Analog engagement may also serve as a conceptual link that leads one back to the digital realm. By employing physical tools—such as a large whiteboard for intricate problem-solving or real sticky notes for planning—rather than solely depending on intangible digital applications, we engage our minds more deeply. Such tactile interaction not only deepens one's memory but also sparks creativity, allowing one to develop ideas in a low-stakes, highly engaging environment before making them formal digitally.

Nature as the Reset Button:

Studies repeatedly confirm that being in nature lowers the production of stress hormones and enhances concentration capacity. During my most stressful study periods, one of my ways to relax was a compulsory 30-minute walk in a nearby park. It served as a complete sensory reboot—a brief stint in which my senses received real, tangible, and multidimensional stimuli instead of the monotonous and overloaded stream coming from the screen.

Structural Redesign: Policy and Platform Advocacy

Politically and socially, individual control over one's behavior is a necessary but insufficient condition. An issue deeply rooted in the system demands solutions at the systemic level that establish and guarantee the right to live off the grid.

A) Policy Interventions: The Right to Disconnect

Time free from digital obligations must be safeguarded by law. The "right to disconnect" policy should be formally accepted and implemented by governments and employers, giving staff and students the liberty not to respond to, or to remain quiet about, work communications outside of regulated hours of work or study. Breaking down the culture of never-ending availability, which causes anxiety, is key to this action.

B) Platform Accountability: Digital Nutrition Labels

If food items are required to have nutrition labels, digital platforms should similarly be obliged to carry "Digital Nutri-

tion Labels," where well-being-related indicators are transparently displayed:

• Average Time: The average time taken for a perceived value to be gained.

• Sleep Disruption Index: A risk estimate of sleep delay based on night-usage data.

• Comparison Index: An index identifying the extent of exposure a user has to highly curated, aspirational content, linking that level to documented mental health issues.

This structural change shifts the design incentive away from exploitation.

C. Redefining Digital Inclusion

"Digital Inclusion" should be redefined to incorporate "digital literacy for an analog balance." That means teaching youth not only how to work with technology but also when and why they should put it down. Digital literacy curricula should include practical skills such as setting up time-limit automations, managing notification cascades, and recognizing the psychological manipulation techniques used by engagement-driven apps.

D. The Role of Digital Detox and Recovery Programs

As digital overuse increasingly turns into an addiction, the need for formal recovery programs becomes inevitable. Emerging models like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Internet Addiction (CBT-IA)—which guides patients in recog-

nizing triggers, restructuring thought patterns, and replacing compulsive digital habits with healthy analog coping strategies—are vital therapeutic interventions.

"Digital Detox" retreats and planned digital sabbaticals—already popular among top-performing professionals and creatives—should be integrated into corporate and educational wellness programs. These deliberate breaks offer individuals the much-needed distance to recalibrate their baseline dopamine sensitivity, thereby making real-life stimuli engaging once again. Governments can facilitate this by providing grants to community centers that host "Analog Skill Workshops" (e.g., carpentry, knitting, gardening), thus endorsing and encouraging non-digital sources of enjoyment and mastery.

The public sector must step in to make digital hygiene as essential as other non-negotiable components of public health, such as sleep and nutrition. The ultimate goal is not to prohibit technology but to handle digital tools like a powerful drug that should only be taken for specific purposes, in prescribed doses, and never at the expense of a patient's overall health. An analog life should be the default state of existence; it should require a conscious effort to engage digitally, rather than an exhausting effort to disengage.

Conclusion

The right to an analog life is the right to be fully human in the 21st century. It is the right to the quiet, unstructured, and necessary reflection required for personal depth, creativity, and real human connection. My experience through a

challenging gap year made me realize that the most powerful tool I had was not my high-speed fiber connection or my advanced educational software, but my capacity to intentionally turn them off.

To bring back equilibrium, we must recognize that the digital world is a tool, not a habitat. We should insist on the establishment of rules that safeguard our mental limits and encourage the design of platforms that protect our well-being. By claiming the right to hit the pause button, we can convert hyper-connectivity from a major source of widespread exhaustion into a strong, selectively used instrument for a more mindful, focused, and truly fulfilling life.

Shivangi Singh

APPENDIX XVI

Essay Competition
The Right to an Analog Life and Mental Balance in the Age of an Over-Digitalized, Contactless Society

Digital Overload and the Need for Disconnection

It is well known that the twenty-first century has been marked by a rapid increase in digitalization. From smartphones and social media to online banking and virtual workspaces, technology is integrated into almost every aspect of human life. While these innovations promise convenience and efficiency, they have also altered the way we function in our everyday lives. A prime example of this is the COVID-19 pandemic, which further pushed society toward contactless interactions while deepening our reliance on technology. Because of this transformation, many individuals are still rediscovering the value of tactile experiences, slow communication, and physical presence—what may be termed the analog life. In our modern world, defined by speed, data, and constant connectivity, safeguarding the right to an analog life is crucial for maintaining mental balance, nurturing genuine human connections, and preserving the authenticity of human interactions.

Digitalization has radically altered how individuals work, interact, and understand the world. Technology has become not just a tool but an entire environment. The constant presence of devices means that life unfolds in an "always-on" mode: notifications punctuate thought, work dissolves into free time, and the boundary between public and private life shrinks. The concept of contactless communication, which was once just a safety measure during the pandemic, has now evolved into normality. People order groceries through apps, conduct meetings on Zoom, pay via mobile devices, and maintain relationships through messages and video calls rather than face-to-face encounters. Although these developments offer convenience, they also risk reducing the value of real experiences and communication, as they minimize the possibility of genuine dialogue and reflection. In our hyperconnected world, individuals are expected to be available at all times, responsive to every signal, and productive without pause. The more digitalized our world becomes, the more humans risk becoming extensions of the systems they once created.

The mental health consequences of digital overload are now widely documented. Numerous psychological studies show that excessive screen exposure correlates with anxiety, attention disorders, and social isolation. Beyond such effects, the emotional consequences are equally profound, as overexposure may lead to numerous mental health hazards, such as depression. While it is obvious that technology multiplies our connections, it also weakens intimacy. Online interactions often simulate closeness while avoiding the vulnerability inherent in face-to-face communication. Social media

has strengthened this phenomenon, as platforms promote comparison, performance, and validation-seeking behavior, leading many users to experience loneliness even with constant connectivity. Moreover, the pressure to maintain perfect digital identities can induce feelings of inadequacy and exhaustion. The constant availability demanded by social media invades our private lives while also disrupting our sleep, attention span, and emotional equilibrium. Without intentional disconnection, individuals risk losing the capacity to take control over their own lives. Keeping all the above in mind, reclaiming analog space is not a luxury but a necessity.

Emerging from these challenges is a moral and even political question: Do humans possess a right to remain partly offline? The digital transformation has occurred so rapidly that legal and ethical frameworks lag behind technological realities. As new, more modern technologies become integrated into our everyday lives, the human right to disconnect from the digital world becomes increasingly urgent. France's "right to disconnect" law is a notable example of how governments are responding to digital overreach. This law allows employees to ignore work emails outside office hours, recognizing that digital intrusion into private time constitutes a form of psychological harm. Similar initiatives are emerging in companies experimenting with "email-free Fridays," in schools banning smartphones during lessons, and in communities encouraging outdoor activities and socialization. Such measures portray an awareness that the analog life must be defended. The right to an analog life also has an important philosophical meaning. It reminds us that not every part of human life should be digitalized. Touch, spontaneity, and physical pres-

ence are vital parts of being human, as they allow us to experience the world directly. Protecting this right means valuing real, physical connection, creating a necessary balance to the distance often created by digital overload.

Acknowledging the need for an analog life does not mean rejecting digital progress. Rather, it calls for a more deliberate integration of technology into human life. The goal is not digital absence but digital balance. One approach is digital minimalism, a philosophy that advocates intentional technology use aligned with personal values. By prioritizing meaningful connections over compulsive scrolling, individuals can reclaim autonomy from algorithms. Public spaces such as parks, libraries, and cafés can serve as non-digital safe spaces where community interaction unfolds without mediation by technology. The revival of vinyl records, film photography, and independent bookstores illustrates a cultural yearning for slowness and tangibility. These are not acts of nostalgia but forms of resistance to digital totalization; they remind us that real value often emerges from friction, imperfection, and direct engagement with materials.

The right to an analog life is, at its core, the right to remain human in a world increasingly shaped by machines. As technology continues to expand, individuals and societies must confront its psychological and ethical implications. Constant connectivity, though convenient, can weaken mental balance and genuine relationships. Protecting spaces of disconnection is both a personal practice and a collective responsibility. To live an analog life in this over-digitalized, contactless society, the key is not to reject modernity but to humanize it just enough to suit your needs, without allowing technology to al-

ter your personality and abilities. The goal is not to turn back the clock but to cultivate awareness in order to use technology consciously. By safeguarding the analog life, we safeguard our sanity, our human relationships, and our unique way of seeing the world—things no algorithm can replicate. The right to an analog life, therefore, is not just a cultural preference but an ethical and moral necessity, a requirement to restore balance between the digital and the human world.

Natalia Filippiadi

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APPENDIX XVII

Essay Competition
"From Users to Humans:
Preserving Presence in the Digital Age"

Introduction

We live in an era where everything has been turned into data—emotions, memories, relationships, even our thoughts. Every action we take leaves a digital trace in an invisible web of algorithms that often knows who we are before we even do. Our society has become over-digitalized: an immaterial reality without touch, without pause, without silence. And yet, amid this electronic ease, a quiet human need grows stronger—the need to preserve the right to an analog life: for genuine contact, rhythm, and mental balance.

Main Body

The right to an analog life is not romantic nostalgia; it is an act of resistance—the right to remain human in a world that increasingly seeks to turn us into data. Technology promised freedom, yet it often guides us into invisible captivity. From the first light of morning to the moment we fall asleep, our eyes face screens—and the screens face us back. Every notification steals our attention, every scroll fragments our focus, and every click transforms us into a measurable statistic.

Over-digitalization is not merely a technological shift; it is a deep cultural mutation. "Contactless" is no longer just a technical term—it has become an existential condition. We live in a world we cannot touch. Relationships have become momentary, conversations brief, and emotions shallow. We have lost awkwardness, pauses, and glances—the fragile details that once gave depth to human encounters.

Young people are growing up with the illusion of being more connected than ever, yet we have never been more detached. We talk more but communicate less. Notifications have replaced anticipation; emojis have replaced expression; filters have replaced imperfection. Mental health is the silent casualty of this digital revolution. Anxiety, loneliness, and attention fatigue are the by-products of a world that measures worth in likes and shares. We are learning to think faster but not deeper—to react, not to reflect. Balance, however, is not a technological objective; it is a human necessity.

An analog life does not mean rejecting technology; it means redefining our relationship with it. It is the right to disconnect without guilt, the right not to be measured, tracked, or constantly available. It is the freedom to exist without Wi-Fi, without an online status, and without the fear that absence equals nonexistence. An analog moment can be a quiet act of revolution: a gaze without a screen, a handwritten letter instead of a message, or a walk without GPS.

Artificial Intelligence promises to understand the patterns of human thought, yet it will never experience human feeling. It can compose music but not silence; describe sadness but

not feel it; predict emotions but not love. AI is not our enemy—it is our mirror. The more it evolves, the more clearly it reflects what it means to be imperfect and therefore profoundly human. Our goal should not be to make machines more human, but to ensure that we remain so.

Conclusion

The revolution of the future will not be loud; it will be a revolution of silence and reconnection. It will begin when someone turns off their phone to look at the sky, writes a thought by hand, or truly listens to another person. The right to an analog life is the right to serenity, thought, and presence. It is the defense of human time against the speed of information.

We are not enemies of progress; we stand for a form of progress that remembers the human being. Technology must remain a tool, not an identity. The future does not need to be disconnected or hyperconnected—it needs to be balanced. We must learn to live with technology, not within it, and to remember that before we became users, we were—and still are—human.

Elpida Athanasiadou

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APPENDIX XVIII

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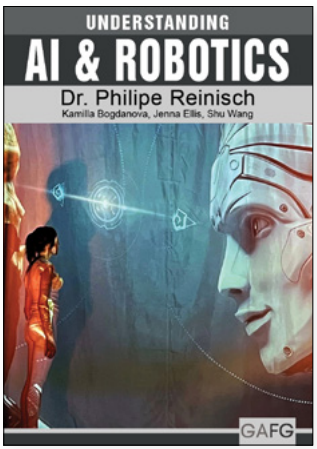

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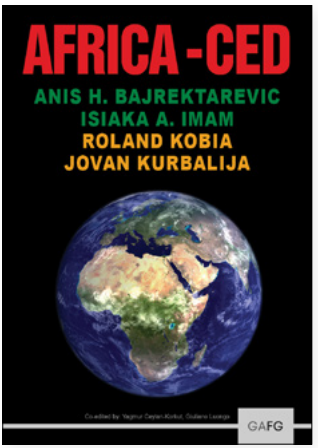

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